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Sam Brooke
ESSAYS.

UPON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS

OF

Literature *and* Morality.

PARTICULARLY

→ Upon the Manner of Writing
in single Thoughts.

Of Conversation.

Of the different Talents of
Writing and Speaking;

Of the Qualities necessary
for Society.

→ Of Criticism upon Works of
Wit.

Of the Effects of Habit.

Of Self-Love and of Modesty.

Of Simplicity, and the dif-
ferent Kinds of Modesty.

Of the Necessity of following
one's Genius.

Of Prepossession, and its Ef-
fects.

Of Good-Humour.

Of Judgment and Genius.

Of Happiness.

Of Reading and Memory.

Of Nobility.

The Distinction between
Pride and Vanity.

Of Politeness.

Of the Natural.

Of Parts.

Of Regard to human Judge-
ment.

Of Infidelity.

Of Riches.

With Reflections upon TASTE; and many other
Curious Topicks.

Translated from the *French* of the Abbot TRUBLET. *Nicolas Charles Joseph*

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. OSBORN, at the *Golden Ball* in *Paternoster Row*. M.DCC.XLIV.

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ESSAYS



ESSAYS

UPON

Several Subjects.

Upon the manner of writing in single thoughts.

I.



Shall begin these essays with some reflections upon the form which I have given them, and shall consider, both with respect to authors and readers; the way of writing in single thoughts. I shall compare the books composed of this sort of thoughts, with works of method and regularity; from whence it will appear, that each of them have their peculiar advantages.

B

The

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The greatest difficulty in writing is order and method. Persons, otherwise of a good deal of genius, are often incapable of performing this part, either from indolence, or too great a vivacity of temper ; or, perhaps, for want of a certain compass and extent of understanding.

A person may have a penetrating and fruitful genius, capable of producing a variety of good thoughts, and yet not of sufficient extent to take a view of them all together, and at one glance ; which, however, is necessary in order to give them a proper arrangement, and to form them into a regular piece.

This arrangement of our thoughts commonly requires a good deal of labour ; and, yet there are persons possessed of all the qualities of a great genius, that are very indolent.

Great vivacity is almost always inconsistent, if not with a strong application, at least with a constant one, to the same object. Hence it happens, that people of a sprightly turn in general reason so very little, start from one subject to another, and think a good deal, but without any order or connexion.

It is not sufficient, that a discourse or treatise be methodical, but, it must also be full and solid, abounding with new and just thoughts. A few good things, lost in an infinite number of common and indifferent

Of writing in single Thoughts. 3

ferent ones, make a work cold and superficial. If what was worth having in such a work had been separated from the rest, and published in single thoughts, it would have given more pleasure to the reader, and done more honour to the writer. We should be much better pleas'd with having only the best part of such a work, than if we had the whole.

II.

It appears, by what we have of *M. Pascal's*, that he was a genius of superior rank, and very capable of that grand work upon religion, of which he had formed the plan. And yet, perhaps, it has been no disservice to his reputation, that his ill health prevented him from executing it. It is possible, the entire work, if we had had it, would have appeared very inferior to the materials which he had laid in for it, and which are left us in the collection of his thoughts. At least, it is certain, that there is a wide difference between such a collection of loose thoughts, and the work which they were designed to compose ; and that a person may be capable of doing what *M. Pascal* did, without being qualify'd for what he intended to do.

I add likewise, that a person who was capable of composing a good treatise from such thoughts as these of *M. Pascal*, might not be capable of finding the thoughts themselves. Which of these two is a work

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of the greatest and most uncommon genius, is a question I may consider in another place.

III.

What a satisfaction would it have been to men of letters in general, and what an assistance might it have given to authors, if the great men who have died without composing the works they were meditating, had but done like *M. Pascal*, and thrown upon paper the thoughts they intended to make use of, and especially the principal ones; those that were to have been the foundation of their whole structure?

It often happens, that the best parts of a work are these first ideas; the thoughts that we find in ourselves without looking for them, and which were the occasion of our first undertaking the subject.

IV.

In general, were it not to be wished, that all such as are capable of thinking, would not suffer any of the good thoughts which occur to them in reading, reflection, or conversation, to be lost? Those who are employ'd in works of connexion, would find an ample provision for them in such collections as these made at first in this manner by little and little, and almost without the trouble of thinking.

How

Of writing in single Thoughts. 5

How often does chance furnish us with thoughts upon a subject, which we cannot recover again when we would compose upon it? There are certain happy minutes in life, which we never see any more. The warmth of conversation, the ideas of others, give birth sometimes to thoughts which we may seek for in vain in our closets, and in a studious hour.

But though a person could easily recal all the thoughts that he has had upon a subject, when he wants to treat of it; yet, how many other thoughts are there, which having no relation to the principal object of an author's inquiries, are, by that means, entirely lost to the publick?

V.

Let us consider now, What part of a work is it, that gives pleasure to a reader of understanding? It is that which enlightens him, that which sets him a thinking; some grand principle or theorem; a new proof of some important truth; or sometimes, perhaps, an extremely happy turn in expressing a very common thought. This now is what a man of sense seeks for in books, and what he likes to remember out of them. But it frequently happens, that he shall find in books of great bulk, but a very few things of this kind.

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There has been a long time a general outcry against the multitude of books ; but it is also generally agreed, and become almost proverbial, that there are no books but what have something good in them. It were to be wished, therefore, that three parts in four of the number were destroy'd, after first making an extract out of them of what was worth preserving. It would make a curious book, if it were well done, with this title, *An extract of the books which are not to be read*. But who shall venture to undertake such a work ? Besides, that it would be a very laborious, very long, and very tiresome task ; it would require, in order to succeed well in it, if not what may be properly called a genius, at least qualities as rare as genius itself ; and, after all, there would be but little honour to be gained from the most happy execution of it. Good books are hardly more scarce than good collections.

VI.

There are some geniuses so fruitful and inventive, that with a slight application, and, as it were, upon the first view of a subject, they shall have such a croud of thoughts as to leave them under no other difficulty but that of making their choice. They reject a great number, which others would value themselves upon having found. Let them have, for example, a discourse to compose
out

Of writing in single Thoughts. 7

out of hand, and for some immediate occasion : their difficulty, it is evident, will be to keep within the compass prescribed, with such a heap of materials as they have upon their hands, to say all in a few words, and to say it as it ought to be said ; to be clear and concise at the same time. There are, it must be owned, some geniuses of this character ; but, for one of these, how many have we of another sort, of so barren and scanty an invention, that they are not able to fill up their intended bounds, without taking in a number of mean things, or, which is very little better, without drawing out their thoughts to such an extent as deprives them of their whole force and gracefulness ?

I shall be told, perhaps, and my book, very likely, may serve for an instance of it, that an author who writes in single thoughts may fall into the same unhappiness, and for a small number of good things may give us an infinite many bad ones.

I answer, that works of this kind, when it is the author himself that publishes them, are commonly more laboured than methodical ones. This is a duty the reader expects from us, and demands it as a matter of right from an author who has released himself from the care of order and connexion.

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The collecting a parcel of single thoughts is a task that admits of interruptions ; and the labour of it may be relieved by frequent intervals of relaxation ; and when the collection is once made, it is easy to retrench all that would be less likely to please in it : whereas, in a regular work, the author is often oblig'd to let a feeble passage stand, which he could not, perhaps, when he had try'd his uttermost, correct ; and which, nevertheless, he must not strike out, because it is necessarily connected with something else.

The transitions in a discourse are one of the most common sources of languid style. A great many methodical performances might be considerably abridged without robbing them of any thing essential to the subject, by cutting off all that the author put in only to bring his thoughts together, to connect them with one another, and to put his work in some form.

However, I allow it is very possible, that a writer of loose thoughts may not be so scrupulous as he ought to be in the choice of them. There are but few persons that are capable of producing any number of good things. There are none but what have at some times their sorry and indifferent ones. And the talent of producing the one is not always accompany'd with that just taste that is requisite to distinguish them from the
other.

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other. But there is still something more in the case : and tho' an author should be sensible, that there are some passages in his work not quite so well as they should be, yet he cannot consent to part with them, from an effect of that natural fondness which we all have for the productions of our own minds ; a passion, generally, of much more force and activity than the reason that opposes it, and which therefore is either quite suppressed, or, at least, entirely defeated by it. In a word, we become either totally blind to our faults, or unreasonably indulgent. But the reader may easily supply, by a second reading, this want of discernment, or excess of partiality, in his author, and, with a single stroke of his pen, point out the passages that deserve to be read again.

VII.

The way of writing in detached thoughts is, in some respects, a great help to the memory. The best method of retaining what is material, in a work of any length, is to reduce it into maxims and sentences, and make so many several articles of it.

Among the persons that have improved themselves by reading, you commonly meet with some that have got by heart as many of the thoughts of *M. Rochefocault*, and *M. Bruyere*, as of the fine passages in our poets. An ingenious reflection, written with
justness

10 *Essays upon several Subjects.*

justness and precision, imprints itself almost as easily upon the memory as a good verse.

On the other hand, a methodical work is more agreeable to read than unconnected thoughts, especially if they run upon a variety of subjects.

The mind does not love to be too long employ'd upon the same object; but neither is it better pleased with passing too swiftly from one object to another, that has no relation with it.

The dependence there is between all the parts of a well-ranged discourse, draws a reader on insensibly. You long to see the end of it, as much as you do in a romance, where the events succeed one another in such an order, as still raises the curiosity in the same proportion that it satisfies it.

A person may throw down a book of loose thoughts, and take it up again, just as he pleases, which is a great convenience. But, then, he cannot bear to read it as long as he would. It does not engage his attention enough for that; and, what is more, it fatigues him.

There is nobody but must have been sensible of this in reading the maxims of *M. Rochefoucault*. This, of all the books in the detached way of writing, is that which one is soonest tired and spleen'd with reading. For, in the first place, the maxims are all so delicate and refined, that they require a great deal

Of writing in single Thoughts. 11

deal of attention in a reader to understand them ; and, in the next, they have no manner of connexion with one another ; whence it happens, that, each of them being but of a small length, you are hurried, as I just now observed, from one subject to another, with too much rapidity.

The spleen and fatigue which I have been complaining of, are more especially felt by readers of an ordinary capacity. They are splenened when they do not understand what they read : and they are tired, when they cannot understand but by mere dint of labour and application. But nothing is more agreeable, than a work written with refinement and delicacy to persons that have themselves a refined and delicate understanding. The more they have of this kind of capacity, the less application it costs them to understand what they read, and to perceive the whole beauty of it.

And this refined way of writing would please such persons more, particularly in the kind of works I am speaking of, in reflections, sentences, &c. as, indeed, it is a principal qualification in that sort of writing. I allow, that in this, as well as every thing else, there is a due mean to be observed. Affectation and conceit must by all means be avoided, and even too much conciseness. But for one or two writers that can justly be reproached with these faults, how
many

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many are there, that give us nothing but what is perfectly common, both in their thoughts, and turn of expression? On the other hand, in those authors we accuse of not being natural, of running after wit, and giving into a false, or, at least, an excessive refinement, how many things have we admirably well thought, and well expressed, for a very few passages in which they are not quite so happy?

VIII.

One would think, that M. *Bruyere* did not give himself much trouble about the censure commonly passed upon M. *Roche-focault*, for giving into affectation, and a vicious subtilty, in his writings. If that charge has any foundation, the author of the *characters* is at least as faulty as that of the maxims; and the style of the two works will admit of the same censure, and the same defence. But M. *Bruyere* has kept clear of other more material faults in the *moral reflections*, by taking some compass with most of his thoughts, and by placing in a series, under the same title, those that relate to the same subject.

M. *Roche-focault* almost always contracts himself into short sentences and maxims; whence it happens, that by giving nearly the same turn to all his thoughts, and disposing them merely at random, he fatigues
you

Of writing in single Thoughts. 13

you by the continual change of his subject, and disgusts you by the constant uniformity of his style : whereas M. *Bruyere* alters the turn of his thoughts with great variety, gives them sometimes more, sometimes less compass, and has disposed his work into all the order it is capable of.

This last advantage the reflections of M. *Roche-focault* have received in the edition of 1714. and all the following ones. They are ranged in these under their proper titles, and, I believe, since that new disposition of them, they have been read with much greater pleasure.

We may see then in M. *Roche-focault*, and M. *Bruyere*, and, indeed, in M. *Bruyere* alone, examples of two kinds of detached writing.

We have a blind sort of it, in the thoughts of M. *Pascal*, in the *Menagiana*, *Huetiana*, and other good books of the same species. These are of somewhat a larger compass, and rise almost to little dissertations. They are upon all sorts of subjects indifferently. You have, here, a critical observation ; there, some learned anecdote ; in another place, a point of morality is discussed, &c. Such variety is very agreeable : and the good books of this kind have met with such general success, that it has multiplied almost to infinite the number of bad ones.

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I could freely join with M. Huet, in ranking *Montaigne's* essays amongst the * *Ana* ; and yet there is some difference between this book and those that commonly bear this title.

These are, for the most part, composed of several articles, which contain one or more thoughts upon the same subject, commonly without any digressions, or, at least, they are very short ones ; after which the author concludes, and passes in the next article to a new subject.

But *Montaigne's* way of writing was very different from this. As thoughts offer'd, upon any subject, he set himself to write : but if these thoughts brought him into any other, that had but the slightest relation with the first, he followed that new thought as long as it produced any thing ; then came back again to his subject, which again he would leave ; and, perhaps, never to return to it any more. Hence, those digressions within digressions in him ; those continual, but agreeable, and very often insensible rambles, to which some incidental sentence, or, perhaps, a single word, gave occasion. One ought to have as much wit, good sense, simplicity, and fine apprehension, as *Montaigne* himself had, to be able to pardon him such extravagance in his way of writing,

* *Menagi-Ana*, &c.

and

Of writing in single Thoughts. 15

and to be pleas'd with him into the bargain. It may be apply'd to him what *Quintilian* has said of *Seneca*, tho' in a different sense; *dulcibus abundat vitiis*, he is full of agreeable faults. I would not, for this reason, advise any person to let his pen run with the same liberty that *Montaigne* did; and I shall be very careful, myself, how I imitate him in this particular. I shall endeavour never to lose sight of my subject, and to mix nothing with it that is foreign to it. But I must intreat my reader to dispense with me for an exact method, and the trouble of transitions, and consider my book merely as a collection of detached thoughts. The time I should have spent in forming these thoughts into a regular piece, (if, indeed, I could have done it at all in any tolerable manner) I have employ'd in clearing them up, in going to the bottom of them, and in endeavouring to express them with as much justness, neatness, and precision, as I am master of.

IX.

A person who has read and thought to any good degree, commonly forms to himself a kind of system made up of his own thoughts, and those of other men, upon the different matters that have been the subject of his reading and reflection. Abridgments drawn out of these systems; pieces in which without either straining for new things, or
yet

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yet declining them, a person endeavours to comprise in a few words the best part of what has been said by others, or thought by himself, upon several points, and to throw together a great number of truths, that before lay scatter'd in various places ; I say, pieces of this kind may possibly be to the taste of some intelligent persons, who love precision, and like to see things at once, and, as it were, at a glance. The most trite and common principles and reasonings may in this method be made to appear quite new, by disposing of them in such a happy assemblage, as shall give new light and force to them. It is according to this idea, that I have done some of the parts which compose this collection. The reader therefore may expect to find, in those parts, thoughts which he has met with before in other books ; and I do not doubt, but, sometimes, I may have added something of my own : tho', if I have, it is without perceiving it, and contrary to my intention.

However, I cannot allow, that an author is to be looked upon as a mere repeater, only because he has said things that have been said by others, tho' he does it in order to set them in a just light, to enlarge upon them, and to unite them with other truths with which they stand in a mutual dependence and connexion. But I dare not flatter myself, that I have never repeated but upon these

Of writing in single Thoughts. 17

these occasions. I am too sensible of the cheats which our memories, at once faithful and treacherous, are apt to put upon us. A person often remembers what he has read, without remembring that he has read it ; and by this means, he takes that for invention which was recollection only. Authors that think the most, are not always secure from surprizes of this kind. For my own part, I shall esteem myself sufficiently happy, if I have remember'd nothing but what was worth remembring, and if, in defect of wit, I have at least shewn some taste and judgment.

But the case is different with respect to some other things it has been my intention to say : I mean, such as have never before seen the light, and probably never would but by my means. I own I have inserted several things of this sort, partly to preserve them from being lost to the public, and partly to give the more weight to my book. But, perhaps, my own thoughts, and those of other people, may be of mutual prejudice to each other. It may be, the part that is properly mine, will be eclipsed by that which is not ; and so the thoughts that I have borrowed, (making but the least part in my collection, and therefore being insufficient to gain reception for the whole) will by this means be still lost to the public.

X.

I am apprehensive there may be some passages in the essays too abstract and metaphysical. I profess only to write upon general points of literature and morals, and, for such, a reader will not think, perhaps, that he can need any great attention. But I must give mine notice, notwithstanding, that he will meet sometimes with a pretty long chain of reasoning; the connexion and force of which it will be difficult for him to perceive without some application.

When a common reader fails to understand the whole of what he reads, in a book written upon some difficult and abstruse subject, he lays the blame no-where but upon himself. But he does not imagine the fault can possibly lie there, when he finds himself at a loss to understand reflections upon poetry and eloquence, upon virtues and vices. As he has read several treatises upon these subjects, and found nothing that ever stopped him before, if he happens to meet with one that is not quite so clear to him, he pronounces immediately, that it is good for nothing; not considering that works may turn upon the same subject, and bear the same title, and yet be of a nature very different; and that the obscurity of some authors is owing to nothing else, but to their having thought more, and to a greater depth,
upon

Of writing in single Thoughts. 19

upon a subject, than others have done, and to their chusing rather to give their reader clear ideas of things, than to fill his head with a heap of confused sentiments.

A person may talk of philosophy like an orator or a poet, and of poetry and eloquence like a philosopher.

It is scarce possible to go to the bottom of any subject whatever, to trace the causes of the most common effects, and to distinguish the nice differences there are in things, without being a little abstract. But to be abstract and obscure, is just the same thing with those who have been accustomed to make more use of their imagination than their reason. A work that is clear to this sort of readers, must be one that gives them some considerable emotion. On the contrary, a philosophical reader frequently finds nothing but obscurity and confusion, where persons of the narrowest capacities imagine they have full light, and perfect demonstration.





O F

CONVERSATION.

 **M**EN subsist in society with one another, but by a mutual communication of their thoughts. Words modified infinite ways, by the air of the face, the gesture, and the different tones of the voice, are the means of that communication. No other method could have been equally easy and extensive: I speak, and in an instant my ideas and sentiments are communicated to the person who hears me: my whole soul, in a manner, passes into his. This communication of my thoughts is, again, the occasion of others in him, which he communicates to me in his turn. Hence arises one of the most lively of our pleasures; by this means too we enlarge our knowledge, and this reciprocal commerce is the principal source of intellectual wealth.

It is true indeed, we converse with the absent by means of writing; to which method,

thod, also, we are obliged for preserving to us the thoughts of those who are no more. But the art of writing, such at least as we are masters of, is founded upon the faculty of speech, implies it, and owes its original to it. Writing is not the immediate sign of our ideas, but only of the words which express them.

Let a person born deaf and dumb have ever so good a capacity, and ever such able masters, yet he shall be able to have communicated to him, in writing, but a very small part of the thoughts which we exchange so easily with one another by the use of speech; and therefore it holds still stronger, that such an art of writing, as men born deaf and dumb would be able to establish among themselves, must be very imperfect.

Every other method, which could have been made use of to supply the place of speech, (as gesture, and all external intimations of our thoughts) are attendants that belong to speech itself. It excludeth none of them, but assists itself of them all; and yet is unable to furnish us completely for all our necessities. There is no language but what is very imperfect: we experience it every day, and the best geniuses are the most sensible of it; neither their ability in the tongue they make use of, nor their skill in composition, will compensate for this imperfection: they find themselves unable to say

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what they think, and precisely in the way they think it. They cannot find words to give a faithful image of their thoughts, which they are therefore sometimes forced to give up, because they are not able to express them to their satisfaction. Upon a thousand occasions, even in conversation, we conjecture rather than understand. The apprehension of the hearer supplies the defect of the speaker, and, from what is said, we guess what is meant, tho' it be not always expressed exactly.

Apprehension, or capacity, is frequently of less importance to lead us into the thoughts of others, than a certain conformity of mind, character, and taste. Persons to whom nature has given this similarity of mind, or who, at least for the present instant, happen to fall into the same way of thinking, and to feel the same impressions, readily, and at once, understand one another; whereas two men of equal parts, but of a different turn of mind, shall often be at a loss in this respect. *M. Arnauld*, tho' a metaphysician himself, did not rightly understand father *Malebranch*, who, at the same time, made himself perfectly intelligible to persons much *M. Arnauld's* inferiors, but whose understanding had more analogy with his own, or who might be said to resemble him in miniature.

II.

Conversation is used either for business or amusement.

Uncivilized people, and, among those that are civilized, the men of business and employment, converse but little together merely for the sake of amusement; the necessities and affairs of life are the common subject of their discourse, even at the times they devote to relaxation: the artificer, over his bottle, talks of his calling, and the merchant of his traffick.

The *English* are said to be but little versed in conversations of mere amusement; being naturally silent, they are not apt to look upon that character as any way defective. They never force a chat, and when the conversation languishes, as it does very often with them, they do not think themselves obliged, as the *French* do, in point of politeness, to relieve and support it at any rate, by saying the most trifling or even nonsensical things. It is on such occasions, that we look upon ourselves as under the greatest necessity of talking, that is, when we have, strictly speaking, nothing at all to say; and, by this, a person gets into the way of saying nothings.

The *French* talk, say foreigners, but they do not think. The reflection is not, perhaps, without foundation; and yet, on the

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other hand, conversation must not be made a study of, and have every thing banished from it that is not grave and serious; nor ought any thing to be call'd a mere nothing, be it ever so trifling, if it has wit or humour in it, and serves to divert and entertain us.

It must be owned, we abound in great talkers, and that a great talker, tho' he is sometimes a man of parts, in one sense, yet they are seldom very solid ones.

The *French* talk all at once, when they get together: their conversations are quite noisy. On the other hand, there is such a profound silence frequently in a large company of *English*, that you would think they were afraid of disturbing one another. The *French* make such a noise, they cannot hear what is said. The *English* say nothing at all. This comes to pretty much the same thing.

III.

A great talker is one of nature's favourites: she has bestowed upon him a gift of great importance to his happiness, and furnished him in this failing, as it is call'd, with the most fruitful resource against the spleen, one of the greatest evils in life.

I ask pardon of society for it; but I have sometimes wished to have been born a great talker myself, and have envy'd those that have been talking me to death.

I have

I have some compassion for a man who talks me into the spleen, merely because he is oppressed with it himself ; and I could heartily wish it was in my power to give such a person any relief : but I am out of all patience with a tedious fellow, who, the more insupportable he is to me, is just so much the less to himself.

It is a circumstance almost equally disagreeable, for a person to find himself in conversation (or rather company) with great talkers who have sense, but will let him hear nothing but themselves ; or with fools, who cannot understand him, or answer him to the purpose.

Provided a person is understood, and relish'd, he amuses himself more in talking than in hearing : a man is always more agreeably agitated and employed in speaking than in hearing.

Our vanity, too, gives a relish to the pleasure of talking ; it is a pleasure of the understanding and the heart, both at once : whereas the pleasure of hearing is merely intellectual ; it does not gratify our vanity at all, but rather mortifies it.

Conversation is never more agreeable, than with persons who have somewhat less sense than ourselves.

A good company must never be too large ; there is no enjoying it, if it is : a person is too much divided and distracted in it. But
in

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in a bad company, the larger it is, the less he suffers from it, and has some relief at least from the variety of it.

A person is soon tired with the best company, where he is only a hearer; and it is sometimes difficult in a large company to hit just the critical moment for taking one's turn: but this is an advantage, if the company be disagreeable; for it is less fatigue to a man of sense to give fools the hearing, while they entertain one another, than to bear a part in the conversation himself; nay, a person may save himself the trouble of even hearing them at all; he may, without changing his place, steal away in some measure from the croud; I mean, retire into himself, and enjoy his own thoughts.

V.

In spite of all the failings which are imputed to the *French*, it is in *France* (as candid foreigners will own) that we must seek the talent for conversation. It is more general, and more esteemed, among them, than in any other nation. The same temperament which disposes them to be fond of, enables them to succeed in it. They talk with ease, by an effect of that natural vivacity which makes them a burden to themselves, and obliges them to fly to conversation for relief. And hence it becomes the principal employment of those among them
who

who have easy fortunes, and are disengaged from business.

The *Frenchman* could not, like the more grave and serene *Spaniard*, support an idle solitude, content with himself, and happy in a mere indolence. If he has nothing to do, he goes in search of somebody that may entertain him, or whom he may entertain; and such it is not difficult to find even among the busiest sort of men, who are not always displeased to be diverted from the fatigue of a laborious employment.

VI.

The pleasure of conversation among the *French* mixes itself with all their other pleasures, and sometimes seems almost to exclude them. They go to public diversions, rather for the sake of chatting, than to see the diversions themselves. And their domestic amusement of play is frequently no more than a conversation over cards: it is the same with their entertainments. The pleasure they enjoy in an agreeable company is, to them, the highest seasoning of their delicacies; and a good judgment, in matching and sorting a company to one another, goes the greatest way with them in what they call the art of entertaining.

The pleasure of conversation, when it is mixed with that of the entertainment, is a great preservative against intemperance; and,
in

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in fact, the *French* are longer at their repasts, and yet more moderate in them, than the generality of other nations.

VII.

There are two different kinds of conversation : the one regularly connected and confined to one subject ; the other turning successively upon different things as they happen to be started. The last is most in use, and most agreeable to the genius of the *French*.

The first sort, however, was greatly in vogue toward the middle of the last age. Play was not so generally established, as it is at present. Less time was spent upon that, and more upon conversation. Taste, indeed, was not yet arrived at that perfection that it has reached since ; but yet there was a greater relish for wit than there is now : and, without understanding it so well, they loved it better. The knowledge of the *belles lettres* made a part of the necessary qualifications of a gentleman ; and such is the inconstancy and caprice of fashion, it was not in those days esteemed polite for a person to pique himself upon his ignorance.

Every body has heard of the famous conversations, or, rather, conferences, at *Rambouillet* house. No doubt, they were equally instructive and entertaining. But what is there without its inconveniences ? To bear a tolerable part in these conversations, a
share

share of fine sense was absolutely necessary ; and the person that had most, made the best figure. The emulation this must breed, made it dangerous, lest these exercises, so useful for refining and improving the understanding, should in time run into pedantry and affectation. And, in fact, they at length produced the sect of the *Precieuses Ridicules*, and the *Femmes Sçavantes*, and gave occasion to those comedies which bear these titles ; the only ones, perhaps, of which it can truly be said that they have reformed the public. But now, to avoid the ridicule which *Moliere* has, perhaps, a little overdone in these pieces, we are got into the opposite extreme infinitely more blameable, and affect stupidity and ignorance, for fear of passing for fops and pedants.

VIII.

Except a few compliments and repartees, every thing that passes in conversation may be reduced to the two heads of relating and reasoning. We reason upon matters of business, learning, or manners ; we report the news, give the story of some adventure or transaction, or quote a piece of history. These two kinds of conversation are commonly mixed together, and succeed each other. Thus we reason upon any fact, or piece of news ; and again we support our reasoning by facts and instances.

It

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It may be said, there is but little reasoning in common conversation : but when I speak of reasoning, I do not mean a regular chain and series of argument. Few people are capable of reasoning in this manner, and as few would take pleasure in hearing them. It would not do by any means in conversation, whither we come purely for amusement. But, still, the most common conversations may be and are full of short and slight reasonings, which, tho' not formally connected with one another, may nevertheless be very just.

IX.

The first rule, with regard to conversation, is, to observe all the laws of politeness in it; both those which may be called natural, as being common to all nations; and those which are founded upon arbitrary custom, and are peculiar to the country where we live. This rule is of all others the most indispensable. By neglecting others, you may fail of being agreeable; but, by violating this, you are sure to give offence.

It is not in a person's power to have fine parts, say, witty things, or tell a story agreeably; but every man may be polite, if he pleases, at least to a certain degree.

Politeness has infinitely more power to make a person beloved, and his company sought after, than the most extraordinary parts or attainments he can be master of.

These

Of CONVERSATION. 31

These scarce ever fail of exciting envy, and envy has always some ill-will in it.

X.

If you would be esteemed, make yourself beloved. Have you but few qualifications to recommend you ? Use a little art, and corrupt your judges by gaining their hearts.

We always esteem the person we love more than he deserves, and the person we do not love as little as ever we can ; nay, we do all we can to despise him, and commonly succeed in it. At first, indeed, our contempt is a little affected. It exists only in the heart and discourse for a while, and does not presently get possession of the understanding : but by degrees it gets to be very real, and we come in time to despise, with all the sincerity in the world, a person worthy of our esteem, if we had not some reason to hate him. But if, notwithstanding our efforts, we are still forced to esteem him, we hate him just so much the more.

XI.

It has been said, Love, if you would be loved. The rule is good, but not infallible. Take a much surer : If you would be loved, esteem, or, at least, seem to do so. Esteem never makes men ungrateful ; and, besides, you will easily be thought sincere. But I will venture to go further, and say, Esteem,
if

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if you would be esteemed. By this means, you engage the vanity of the persons you have to do with, on your side. They will quickly esteem you in their turn. Trust their selfishness for that. Men are so ridiculously vain, that they will be flatter'd with your esteem, at the same time that they have the utmost contempt for you. But if they should have an esteem for you, your esteem will sooth them so much the more. The person who esteems us, we think, has, at least, some judgment, especially if, besides esteeming us, he despises our rivals.

XII.

He that has most of those qualities which procure esteem, ought to have still more of the amiable ones. A person of but moderate merit, in point of understanding, has occasion for the less of that which is seated in the heart. It is said sometimes, and in one sense it is true, That the goodness of a person's heart must make up for the defects of his understanding. But it is still truer, that the perfections of the understanding must be counterbalanc'd by those of the heart.

Great talents for conversation require to be accompany'd with great politeness. He who eclipses others, owes them great civilities.

I was one day at a friend's with M. ****. He shone exceedingly in the conversation,

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as usual, and the whole company, which was very large, seemed to be mightily charmed with him, except two or three men of wit, who sat a little grave the whole time. At the end of the conversation, I observed that he addressed himself to them, and talked to each of them separately with an air extremely gracious. We came away together, and, being very familiar with him, I said to him, You did well to pay some civilities to those gentlemen at parting. They were shining when you came in, and, since that, they were not once taken notice of. The whole attention of the company was fixed upon yourself. Doubtless, it was a great mortification to them, and you did but right to make them some satisfaction.

XIII.

There is no risque in displaying your wit in conversation with those, who, on one hand, have enough of their own to relish it, and, on the other, are too much above you, by their rank and fortune, to look upon you with envy. With my equals, says he, I always suppress one half of my wit; and never indulge it to the full, but with those great people who have wit themselves. By observing this, I never yet found, that I drew their envy upon me; and if, at any time, they gave intimations of this sort, I have

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always

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always imputed it to a strain of their politeness.

The case, I own, would be different, added he, if those great persons were my masters, or likely to be so. If I had a view of entering into their service, or if I lived in a situation of some familiarity with them; in that case, I should endeavour to hold them up in the agreeable delusions of greatness: I would leave them to imagine their understandings equal to their fortune: I should be cautious how I let them feel my superiority over them, nor have I any failing in the world I should be more careful to conceal from them. When I wanted to entertain them, I would set them to talk freely of themselves, and would make them believe they gave me infinite pleasure.

Numbers ruin themselves with the great by a contrary conduct, and get their ill will by what they imagine will procure their esteem. Whatever a mistaken vanity may tell us, it is better to please in conversation than to shine in it.

XIV.

A second general rule in conversation is, to conform yourself to the taste, character, and present humour, of the persons you converse with. This rule is a consequence of the foregoing. Politeness dictates it, but it requires more than politeness to observe it.

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It is even impossible to observe it perfectly. For, besides that so nice a discernment of mens different understandings and humours, and the different methods of applying them, as is necessary for this purpose, is a talent extremely rare ; there is still further a great difference between knowing what to say, and being in a capacity for saying it.

For this reason there is no man alive capable of pleasing all the world alike in conversation ; of adapting his style, subject, and manner, at pleasure, to all persons, and all occasions. The most extensive genius and abilities were not sufficient for this, without universal knowledge, and both together would be incomplete, without the qualifications of the heart, a large fund of good nature and complaisance. Thus every thing, in a manner, should be united, to form a person truly agreeable in conversation ; for I can by no means think this character belongs to persons that are agreeable only by virtue of some single talent, suppose that of story-telling, or raillery, or who are able to talk but upon some particular subjects : these men can hit the taste but of a few, and theirs only for a time. Such uniformity never fails at length to produce disgust.

When I say, that a person, to be completely furnish'd for conversation, must unite in himself all sorts of qualifications ; I do not mean, that he must excel in them all. No,

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he is obliged, properly speaking, to excel in nothing.

If you mean to write, give yourself to one single subject; go to the bottom of your science, whatever it be; be attentive to that voice of nature, which calls you to one kind, and commonly forbids you every other; consult your friends; distrust your own vanity, which thinks you capable of every thing, and, from an odd kind of humour, delights itself in struggling with difficulties that are invincible. I say, Distrust yourself, and that propensity which carries you to one thing rather than another, and that taste which, perhaps, qualifies you sufficiently to judge of works of that kind. That propensity, and that taste, are not always certain indications of a talent. There is a great distance from the admirer and connoisseur to the most indifferent performer. I repeat it, therefore; If you will write, beware of the ambition of being universal. But if your aim is conversation, the case is different; and you will succeed better with that sort of merit which results from the assemblage of several superficial articles of knowledge, and several moderate attainments, than by the most distinguish'd excellence in any one particular way.

Not but that a person must follow his talent in conversation as well as in writing, must contain himself within the bounds of
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what he knows, and never talk upon things he is ignorant of, unless it be with a view to inform himself. This rule, again, is of the utmost importance. A person cannot fail in the observance of it, without making himself ridiculous ; and yet how often do we see it transgressed ! Persons will talk of war and politics, that, perhaps, understand nothing but the *belles lettres* : some are capable of reasoning, and good only at grave discourse ; yet they will aim at humour and pleasantry, tho' with the worst grace imaginable. And hence it is, that we see a man of merit sometimes appear like a coxcomb, and bear a man of genius talk like a fool *.

XV.

Be what you are, is said to men continually. Do not go out of your own proper character. Be simple and unaffected in your manners and discourse. But why need this be said to them, when, if they consider it, it is certainly painful to them to do otherwise ? They must force nature for it, and never did any man yet force her with success—Ridiculous effect of vanity ! the most unhappy of all our passions in its projects, because the most injudicious in the choice of its means.

* *Bruyere.*

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You are desirous of esteem, and still more afraid of contempt : you will certainly obtain that esteem by the qualities you have ; whereas you will make yourself infinitely contemptible, by affecting those you have not. Leave them to others. They are their portion. Yours, perhaps, is full as good, and it belongs only to yourself to make it better. By cultivating the stock you have received of nature, you will infallibly produce something that will please ; at least, you can never please but in this method.

XVI.

There is nothing but vanity, and a very mistaken kind of it, that can induce us to talk of things we are ignorant of ; for a person can never be a stranger to his own ignorance. Every man can tell, surely, what he does know, and what he does not. But persons often think, in good earnest, they have a talent in the very things where they have least. There is no person so utterly void of humour, no story-teller so tedious, who doth not think himself very entertaining and agreeable.

I do not say, that vanity has never any hand in this delusion. But it seems to me, too, that the impulse by which we are carried to particular things, is sufficient almost of itself, to persuade us, that we are fit for them. This persuasion is commonly an
occasion

occasion of vanity ; or, to speak more properly, of pride ; that is to say, a high opinion of our excellencies and attainments, and our superiority to other people. But vanity, or a desire of possessing others with an opinion of them, a desire of being great in one's own eyes, is not always the chief cause of this persuasion. Men think they excel in what they attempt ; if they did not, they never would attempt it, while they are free to let it alone. But that which sets us upon doing things, is not always the mere desire of shining, of distinguishing ourselves, and being entertaining to other people ; but it is, besides this, the pleasure we take in it ourselves. And see now in what often consists the vanity of which we accuse people. Will that man, we say, never leave off aiming at humour, without the least talent in the world for it ? What vanity ! Rather, should we say, What deplorable weakness and blindness ! For, take away all his vanity, and you will find he has as strong an itch for being facetious, as ever. Mistake not the matter : it is not for your sake that he is so witty, but his own ; and if he thinks he diverts you, it is because he pleases himself. It is not because humour and pleasantry are agreeable, and make the persons admired that have any talent for them, that he becomes an adventurer ; but by an error of nature, which has given him a taste

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in this way, without a genius for succeeding in it, he feels an impulse to be humorous, and therefore attempts it.

It is commonly an easy matter to distinguish what people do from vanity, and what from natural inclination ; and I affirm, that these principles are not often mistaken ; tho' we are apt, out of ill-nature, to talk of persons otherwise than we think of them. In the view of making a man odious, we seize sometimes on false appearances, to load him with a vice of which we know he is not guilty.

XVII.

Of all the several ways in which a person may depart from his natural genius and character in conversation, there is none more ridiculous than the propensity to humour in persons that are born to none. And it is still much worse, if a person not only forces nature, but breaks thro' the decorum of his character, and adds indecency to ridicule.

There is nothing, then, a person ought to affect less than this talent. There is no kind of affectation half so dangerous. Bad humour is the worst of all bad things. The true is very hard to hit, and very rare ; and the best is attended with great inconveniencies. The character of a professed droll, a sayer of fine things, or a merry story-teller, is a character that commands but little consideration in the world,
and

Of CONVERSATION. 41

and exposes a man daily to a thousand disagreeable occurrences of a very mortifying nature. The persons before whom these gentlemen play their *little pieces*, have scarce more respect for them, than the pit has for the common players, and often fancy they have a right to treat them with as little ceremony. He who undertakes to divert a company in this way, must put on the fool's coat, and lessen himself considerably in their eyes; and will hardly get them to admire his talent, till he has made them despise his person.

Let a man have ever so good a talent for humour, yet he grows tiresome at last, if he does not know when to give off. The best drolls are subject to a great deal of false humour, and the laughter they raise is frequently but a sneer.

There are some performers this way the most ill-natured buffoons in the world, and whose only employment is to divert one part of the society, at the expence of the other; a very dangerous one! and which never fails to be rewarded with universal hatred.

XVIII.

There are several other rules depending upon those I have been mentioning, which direct more in detail what we ought to do, and what to avoid, in conversation; but they are too common to make it necessary to

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to point them out. Not but that they are transgressed as frequently as those of a nicer and more delicate nature. But then it is never owing to ignorance, that they are so. Nothing is more common, with regard to faults in conversation, than to commit the very same we have been observing in others, and imitate even while we are censuring them. To instance in one a thousand times quoted, and therefore the more undeniable : There is no rule more common, than that which forbids a person to talk often or long upon himself. Nothing can be more disagreeable than such perpetual *egotism*. As this is a fault that gives particular offence to those that are most guilty of it, they are always the first to condemn it in others. But this generally proves an occasion of their falling into it. I have known a long and tedious discourse, of which the speaker was himself the subject, begin with this preface ; I never talk of myself, I am free from this failing.

This fault of talking much of one's self, tho' persons of the best sense are sometimes guilty of it, yet it generally implies but very little. It is seldom too, that a man speaks of himself with an entire sincerity, because it is his vanity that leads him to the subject. And this adds very much to the tediousness of such discourses.

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I could, with great pleasure, listen to a person of a good heart, and sound understanding, while he talked to me of himself naturally and sincerely. I believe there would be somewhat very improving in a conversation of this kind : and when a mind of a certain order appears undressed, it must be a spectacle equally agreeable and instructive,

XIX.

Some authors have blamed *Montaigne* for talking too much of himself in his essays, and with reason enough upon one account. There are things of a certain nature which a man cannot say of himself to others, without danger to them in whatever manner he says them. But *Montaigne* goes yet further : he really boasts of things that are scandalous, and which it is not allowable to mention. This was certainly unbecoming a man of virtue and good manners : for this reason, there are few persons who would not willingly have his essays retrenched in some of those passages where he speaks of himself ; but it is too severe to desire to have it done in all, on pretence that vanity might have some part in them. Some of these passages are the most agreeable in the whole book.

Montaigne has studied and described man, by studying and describing himself. And this is, indeed, the best way of studying him,

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him, and the only way of describing him to the life.

To mix one's self in a book with the things that are the subject of it, is not right; but a person may, like *Montaigne*, make the subject of his book out of himself, and mix other things with it.

If *Montaigne* talked as much of himself in conversation, as he does in his essays, it might, indeed, give offence. But there is a good deal of difference, in this respect, between a conversation and a book; and we can read with pleasure what we should be shock'd to hear.

It is no great disturbance to a reader, that vanity has set an author a talking, provided it has not carry'd him beyond the truth; especially if the author has been dead a good while. It is cotemporary vanity, the vanity that lives with us, that offends and mortifies us. I can laugh at a vanity, with which my own can never interfere.

It were to be wished, that all writers of genius, after the example of *Montaigne*, had left behind them, in some sincere memoirs, a faithful pourtrait of their own heart and understanding. There are some philosophical readers, who would set a higher value upon these pieces, than on all their other writings.

XX.

It is with talking of one's self, when one has a good deal of wit, as it is with singing, when one has a fine voice ; a person must do neither till he is asked, and then give off very soon. But tho' he must sing at the first request, to prevent a suspicion of pride, he must refuse to talk of himself for some time, and must not be prevailed upon without a kind of importunity.

WE have, in madam *de Scuderi's* romances, a model of those learned and ingenious conversations at *Rambouillet-bouse*, which I mentioned before. It will be said, perhaps, that these do not give us any very high idea of them ; and, indeed, it must be allowed, that the conversations of these romances appear tedious to the generality of readers, and have not a little contributed to put the world out of conceit with the romances themselves : not but that several of them are very ingenious ; but they are ill placed in a romance, where the reader looks for facts, and not discourses. They interrupt the narrative sometimes, where it is most interesting ; and retard the discovery of the plot, when we expect it with most impatience.

With the natural curiosity I feel to see the conclusion of a history, I find your story
but

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but too long of itself, and you make it still longer by your digressions. I burn to know what will become of your parties, and you tell me their sentiments of love and gallantry. All this may be very beautiful, and finely imagined; but it is quite a different thing that I want. Satisfy the curiosity you have raised in me. Your tedious interruptions tire me to death. In short, I lose all patience, and can bear no longer with a book where nothing is brought to a conclusion.

Besides, you bring five or six persons into the dialogue. In a real company, indeed, many speakers might enliven the conversation, and give an agreeable variety to it; but, in a book, they only serve to confound the reader. I am not able to distinguish your parties with exactness, and see that difference of character which determines to each of them his peculiar sentiments. By this means, I lose the true pleasure of the dialogue, and cannot fancy myself present at a conversation.

This, now, will account, why the conversations in romances have been so justly disliked, however otherwise ingenious and well written. But it does not follow from hence, that conversations of a more probable kind, upon more interesting subjects, and which have really passed among persons of genius, may not be very useful and agreeable.

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OF CONVERSATION. 47

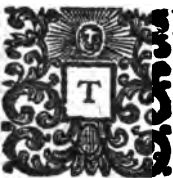
We have, besides, of madam *de Scuderi's*, some volumes of detached conversations upon several moral subjects. A pen of so much spirit and delicacy as hers, was very fit for that kind of writing; and these conversations were well thought of, when they first appeared. But they are not read at this time of day: and the chief reason of the oblivion, into which they are fallen, is, that they are an imitation of ~~some~~ what that subsists no more, and of which we have intirely lost the relish. Formerly they were read to form good manners and politeness; but the manners and politeness of our age are so very different from those of the past, that we should learn them only at this time of day to make ourselves ridiculous.

I have read your conversations, says a lady to me, for whom I had bought the work; but I shall be careful how I read them to my daughters: perhaps they may think it all very fine, and fit to be imitated, for they have some wit; and there would be less danger in this kind of reading, if they had not. The conversations are grave enough of conscience, and yet I can never read them without laughing. I always fancy myself in a company where every body is dressed after the antient mode. I see nothing, methinks, but huge collar-bands and fardings,



OF THE
Different TALENTS
FOR
SPEAKING and WRITING.

I.

THERE are persons who write well, and speak ill ; or, at least, who write a good deal better than they speak : and there are others that speak well, and write as ill ; or, at least, that speak better than they write. This is a fact, of which experience every day furnishes us with new proofs. Let us endeavour now to find out the reasons of it. It is a point, we see, that has a good deal of relation with the last we were upon. I am to inquire, why all those who have a talent for conversation, have not one for writing ; and why those who have a talent for writing, have not that of conversation.

II. The

II.

The first of these questions, that is, how it is possible for a person to write well, and speak ill, is most easy to resolve. In order to speak well, a person must think readily and neatly. But there are some persons of very good genius, that are cold or slow in their conceptions, and that cannot think without taking some time and pains about it : at least, their thoughts present themselves confusedly. They require some study to unfold them, and to bring them to that degree of neatness, in which expression follows of itself.

M. *Nicole*, one of the greatest writers of the last age, was not master of much fluency in conversation : and one day mentioning M. de T***, one of the best speakers in the world, he said, I own he is my master in the chamber ; but as soon as I am down stairs, I think myself the better man.

III.

Professed authors have commonly but little acquaintance with the world : they are a solitary kind of people, who read and write much more than they talk. The style of conversation is not at all familiar to them : the common subjects of it they are still less acquainted with. These have nothing interesting in them for such persons ; many of whom employ themselves upon
E subjects

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subjects that are never talked of in the world ; or, if they write upon matters of taste and entertainment, it is generally in such an abstract and argumentative way, as, though it may please in a book, where one comes to consider these things in a philosophical light, yet it is excessively tiresome and disagreeable in conversation.

IV.

Men of an uncommon and superior genius have frequently less facility in expressing themselves, than those of inferior abilities ; because they think more, that is to say, their thoughts are more new, more delicate, and more profound. When a person has only common and simple ideas, it is not to be wonder'd at, that they should be clear and distinct. But it is just as natural, for new and complicated ideas, for deep conceptions of things, to present themselves to the mind in some confusion ; and consequently, that a person should not be able at once to express them properly. We find it daily, both in writing and speaking, and especially in translating from one language to another, that the best thoughts are those which cost most pains to express them : though this difficulty of expressing one's self does not always proceed from an embarrassment and perplexity of ideas. A person has often a very lively conception, and
clear

Of Speaking *and* Writing. 51

clear idea of what he would say, without being able to say it to his mind. If it was not for this, nothing would be more easy, than to translate well ; and every man of sense, that was properly acquainted with two languages, might translate as quick as he could write ; whereas, in fact, though it may not require so much genius to translate, as to produce an original, it requires very near as much time and pains. A person may perfectly understand a fine passage in *Horace* or *Ovid*, and perceive the whole beauty and delicacy of it, and yet not be able, without long study, and repeated trials, to render it with success : nay, frequently, he cannot do it at all.

Our language, as it appears to us in the works of some of our best writers, seems to be rich in expression. But I am satisfy'd, that they have found it poor enough upon some occasions ; that they have not always said all they meant to say ; and that their expression does frequently fall short of thoughts.

It is pretty nearly the same case with the expression of a good author, compar'd with his conception, as it is in a translation, compar'd with its original. The translator cannot, for his life, come up with the author he translates ; and just so, the writer of his own thoughts cannot, if I may say so, with his utmost efforts, come up to himself.

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It is seldom, said one of our best writers to me, one day, that I am perfectly satisfy'd with what I write. I have a notion, that I still, some-way or other, outdo my works; that I think above what I write; and that, if my mind could be read, when I am at work upon a subject I have thoroughly consider'd, there would several things appear in it, which I have not been able to put upon paper.

It is certain, then, that the beauty of thoughts, that is, their novelty, depth, and delicacy, is itself an impediment to the expressing them well; and from hence it follows, that a man of genius, merely because he is so, often delivers himself with less ease, than many persons of very superficial parts.

V.

Purity and elegance of style make a great part of the merit of works of entertainment; and if they are not absolutely requir'd in all sorts of works, it may at least be affirmed, that there are none but what have a considerable advantage in being well written. But a style, over and above exact, is not at all the style of conversation: besides, it is scarce possible to be master of it in off-hand discourse. However, there are persons that acquire this manner in their conversation, by being used to write. They accustom themselves, in their studies, to a certain justness
of

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of thought and expression, and they are ashamed to speak with less. They will say nothing but what would bear the press. They compose as they speak. Hence that air of labour and study, which gives so much pain to all that hear these fine speakers; that tedious deliberation, that tires you to death. Mere pedantry this, and most mistaken vanity! They had better not talk quite so well, and be a little quicker.

People should not write as they talk, except in letters (which are but a conversation in writing): it is too careless. And they neither can nor ought to speak as they write, for this would be unnatural. I suppose it was first intended as a compliment to a person to say, *He talks like a book*; but this, which was once looked upon as a compliment, and was, indeed, a pretty high-strain'd one, has served since for one of the distinguishing marks of a coxcomb.

VI.

To speak with ease, and to speak well; and to speak with difficulty, and to speak ill; is, with the generality of the world, the same thing: and, indeed, so it ought to be. The pain which I feel for a person who speaks with pain himself, hinders me from perceiving it, if he says any thing well; and therefore it is no wonder, if I form a judgment of him to his disadvantage.

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And, in reality, this judgment is not absolutely false. It is certainly true, in one sense, that he who talks with difficulty, talks ill : perhaps, there may be nothing to be found fault with in his discourse itself. The defect, if I may say so, does not lie so much in what is said, as in him who says it ; for we talk with more or less ease, according as our ideas, whatever they are, succeed one another with more or less quickness. But now, this quick succession of ideas is really a happiness, an advantage ; and the contrary, an unhappiness, a defect. It is therefore always a sort of excellence to talk with ease and readiness ; and it is a real imperfection to talk slowly, and with difficulty. But then, it is such an imperfection, as does not always imply less genius in those who have it, than in those who have it not : it only implies, that they have a less share of it than they might have.

When I say, that a fluency of speech arises from a quickness in the succession of our ideas, I mean a moderate degree of quickness ; for otherwise our ideas confound and destroy one another. There may be such a croud of thoughts, as to make it impossible to utter them ; and there are some persons, that are fools merely by having their ideas pass with too much rapidity, which is also the case with people in liquor : so that it may be truly said, that an extreme

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tremè vivacity always approaches to folly, and the condition of some persons may also be very justly expressed, by saying, They were born drunk.

Quickness in discourse serves to conceal the faults, as well as to heighten the beauties of it. Indeed it may be of prejudice to some beauties of a very refined and delicate nature : but beauties of this kind do not suit with conversation : quickness is indispensable in it. Every thing must be banished, that will take up time to be thoroughly understood and relished, be it ever so fine, rather than a person should talk too slowly.

A person that talks fluently, both engages and moves us with the multitude of ideas which he plies us with all at once ; whereas he who talks slowly, giving us but little at a time, and making us wait a good while for that, unavoidably spleens and chagrines his hearers, especially if they have any share of vivacity.

VII.

Persons that are but little used to the world, are commonly bashful, and by that means awkward and embarrassed in their conversation. It is not always that they do not know how to talk well. You shall take a person of this sort for a natural in some companies, that with others, and amongst his own friends, you will find a man of very good sense.

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Bashfulness cramps a man's genius : but a modest assurance, a confidence that one is heard with pleasure, and an acquaintance with the character of those one speaks to, set a man at his ease, and give him room to display himself.

VIII.

An author does not always come into company, with his mind so free and disengaged, as might be wished. He many times makes a visit, with his head full of the thoughts he has been employ'd upon in his study : he is full of the subject of his treatise. How, then, can he talk, when he is no more in a capacity of hearing ? The distractions which men of letters are subject to, from this cause, produce sometimes very pleasant scenes.

And to this distraction may be added, that flatness and depression of spirits they are subject to from the same cause.

An author very often has recourse to a visit, by way of relief, after a long and fatiguing application. As soon as the message is delivered, every body anticipates the pleasure of his conversation, and expects wonders from a person of such celebrated parts. But it is all a mistake. After the first compliments are over, there succeeds an universal silence : all are hushed, and in expectation that he will speak. At length, impatient of staying any longer, somebody tries
to

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to engage him, by addressing something to him ; and he replies to them in monosyllables. Where, now, are his usual wit and pleasantry ? What is become of that imagination, so copious, so brilliant ? It is all no more. A few hours application has sunk this great man below the common level of mortals. One half of his spirits is vanished, and the other half is still in his book.

But, abstracting from these great depressions, occasioned by an excessive application, it is the common effect of close study to abate the vivacity of a person's temper, and make it too heavy for conversation.

Since M. N**** is become an author, says a lady of his acquaintance, I can no more find any wit that he has. His books, indeed, entertain me ; but his conversation was much more to be valued, because I could have it every day. I have been a prodigious loser by what the public has gained. It has robbed me of my friend, and one of my highest entertainments.

IX.

And thus, I imagine, we have found the chief reasons of that effect which we see so daily ; *viz.* that those who write well, talk ill ; at least, are very barren in conversation, and find themselves often eclipsed by people of very inferior abilities.

If

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If I was to make this point any clearer, I must be forced to produce instances, and apply the premises, I have laid down, to some of our most celebrated authors, that have not been equally masters of both these talents of writing and speaking. But hear, now, my reasons why I cannot do this. Among the authors I might pitch upon for this purpose, some of them, as *Corneille*, and *la Fontaine*, have been long since dead; and they were persons I never knew. But to attempt to give an account of their particular turn of genius, only upon the credit of what I have read or heard of those writers, and without any personal knowledge of them, would be to build a system upon a very weak foundation, and expose myself to the hazard of giving mere imaginations in the place of truth. There may be found, indeed, in our own times, some authors, whose conversation does not come up to the perfection of their writings. I have had an intimacy with some of them myself, and therefore might speak of them with the more assurance: but I am sensible, that no reflections upon living authors ought ever to be carried beyond their works, or be suffered, in the least, to touch upon their persons. I am afraid I have said too much already. Let us proceed, therefore, to the second question, and examine how it happens,

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pens, that some persons talk well, and write ill.

X.

This is a point not so easily clear'd as the first. To speak, and to write, if one might reason against facts, seem to differ as from more to less. There is more difficulty in talking, than in writing ; because he that speaks, is under a necessity of producing off-hand what he has to say, or, at least, the dress into which he puts it ; whereas he who writes, may take up what time he pleases : so that he who speaks well, should, according to this, be easily able to write still better. The ideas which were denied to a first search, may be expected to be more favourable to our repeated efforts ; the judgment will have time to make its choice out of those which the imagination had presented too confusedly ; and a second application will, in all respects, finish the outlines and rude sketches of a first : whereas, in conversation, a person is obliged to speak that which first offers itself to the mind, and in the same form too in which it is offered. There is no time either to correct that which comes, or to seek for any thing better ; and, for such a choice as can be made of expression in the hurry of discourse, it is too hasty to be at all depended upon.

But

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But experience, sometimes, contradicts all these reasonings. We shall see presently, what is true, and what is false in them. For the present, I shall only affirm, that the best speakers seem to speak much better than they really do.

The ears, it has been frequently observed, are not so hard to be satisfied as the eyes. The mind makes a very hasty examination of what it receives through this medium, and very often, in this examination, a thousand circumstances contribute to impose upon it, and every one with some effect. All that is agreeable or engaging in the speaker, is just so much advantage to what he says, and commonly gives it a value with us much above the real one. We find this every day, when we are reading a discourse we have heard pronounced, or a play, for instance, we have seen acted. Are we not frequently brought, by this means, to abate considerably of the opinion we first conceived of it, and even to have an utter contempt of what we once thought extremely well of? In forming these opposite judgments, we do not think we contradict ourselves, properly speaking. We avow them without concern, and impute them, not so much to ourselves, as to the object, which seems, in some measure, to be changed. Both the discourse and the play would still please us, under the same circumstances in which they pleased us

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us before. It was from the pleasure they gave us that we inferred the real goodness of the works, and by a consequence just enough, because they were made but to please us. If we dislike them since, it is because they are deprived of all that accessory part, that attended them at their first hearing. And this impression of them is still just. Our pleasure was occasioned only by these circumstantialia, though, by an error almost invincible, we confound them with the things themselves.

It is certain, therefore, that if what was spoken in conversation by one of the best speakers in the world, was to be written down, and we could read afterwards what we had only heard at first, we should find a number of faults, of every kind, which we had not perceived before ; and, on the other hand, the real beauties of it would strike us with a much fainter impression than they had done at first. Surprize gives them infinite advantages ; and, besides this, they are embellished in the mouth of the speaker with a thousand graces, which cannot be taken down with the pen.

I once advised a friend of mine, a man very sprightly in conversation, to spend a few minutes every day in recollecting and writing down the good things he had said that day. But he answered me, perhaps, with more truth than he imagined, That there

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there was malice in my advice, and that I gave it him only in order to mortify him.

XI.

But whilst we are reducing to its just value this talent of speaking, in those that carry it to its highest pitch, whether in conversation, or off-hand discourses, such as those of preachers or pleaders, that do not use themselves to compose; it must, nevertheless, be allowed, that many of them do in reality speak better than they write; and that their discourses, which are not composed, but deliver'd only after a general preparation, are far superior to those which they have spent the longest time and most pains about.

This difference cannot arise from any thing, but the different temper in which the same person finds himself in his study and in company, or when he appears in public. If there are some that are quite daunted, and struck mute, at the sight of a few persons, and still more at the sight of a numerous assembly, that are to be their hearers, there are others again, upon whom these things have a very different effect. These, cold and spiritless in their studies, are animated and inflamed in conversation, and much more still in public performances. Their audience inspires them. The imagination, thus heated, communicates to the
voice

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voice and gesture a force and vehemence, which again act upon the mind, and redouble its agitations. The motions of the body promote the motions of the soul, that caused them. The whole is a kind of inebriation. Then it is that those happy conceptions, those strong and forcible expressions, those lively and natural turns, present themselves in crowds to the mind, which the same person might weary himself in vain to find, at another time, and without these extraordinary helps to his invention.

Hence it is, that the genuine, the sublime eloquence, that which persuades, that which affects and moves us, is very rarely to be met with in books. I do not mean only, that the reading of a book does not make the same impression upon us as the hearing a discourse delivered, because a great part of eloquence consists in action; but I say yet more than this, that eloquence, both of thought and expression, will never be found to the same degree, in a discourse composed at leisure, and in one made off-hand by a man naturally eloquent.

The greatest orators of past ages were not, perhaps, those whose works are come down to us; and it is not so much from the orations of *Cicero* and *Demosthenes*, as upon the testimony of their cotemporaries, that I judge them to have been the most eloquent men of their time. Besides, we are not to believe,

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lieve, that they pronounced, word for word, all the orations which we have at this time of day, under their name.

Among the orators that have written their speeches, the most eloquent are not those that are labour'd most. We find, indeed, more justness, more order, more delicacy ; but you find in the others more of force, and of those grand movements, which are the very soul of true eloquence. It is no paradox, therefore, to say that it is an easier thing to be eloquent in talking, than in writing. It is an opinion which some very able orators themselves have maintained, upon the authority of their own experience.

I knew an author, that never writ till he had first had several conversations with his friends, upon the subject he intended to treat of ; and this he did, not merely with a view to pick up ideas from what they said, but to raise them in himself by that warmth of imagination which he acquired in talking. By this method, he said, he found in a moment that which would have cost him whole days in his study, and, perhaps, he might not have been able to find at last. I would talk to my footman, says he, for want of a more competent auditor. I always find myself infinitely more animated by this method, than when I think by myself.

XII. But

XII.

But I will give yet another reason of the fact I am endeavouring to account for, less general, in truth, than the first, but I do not believe less solid.

There is, if I may say so, a judgment of instinct, and a judgment of reflection. Some persons have only the first of these, a quick and sudden apprehension of what is good, independent of all reasoning whatsoever. If they go to reflect upon that first impression, and examine the judgment they have formed upon the reports of it, they are presently embarrassed and confused; they know not what to abide by, and generally end their perplexity by judging wrong. Now, this is what happens to them in writing; the leisure they have for examining their thoughts, only serves them for making a bad choice: and while the judgment is thus hesitating, the imagination grows cold; this deliberation extinguishes all their fire, and they have neither light nor heat left.

XIII.

In short, there are some persons of so lively a make, that they are almost incapable of a solitary application, by reason of the distractions which crowd in so thick upon them when they are delivered up to themselves: their imagination roves and wanders from thought to thought: their vivacity

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renders them capable of strong impressions, but they want the power of making these lasting. Now this is done for them by conversation, and performing in public. The countenances, the discourse, of those that speak to them, and to whom they are obliged to reply ; the attention and regard of a numerous assembly, their hearers and judges, whom it imports them to please ; all this fixes their levity, keeps them down to the point before them, calls them back, if they ramble ; and gives order and connexion to their thoughts.

XIV.

A person said once, If I could but recollect, and write down, when I came home, all that I have said in conversation, I believe I might turn author with some success. And for this he was thought very vain. But, if he had said, As it is the opinion of all the world, that I talk well, I believe I should write well too, if I was to write ; the speech would have been much less assuming than the first, and would have had, at least, an appearance of truth in it. One may allow a person, that shews good parts in conversation, to believe himself capable of writing well ; but it is an insufferable assurance for him to think, that what he says off-hand, and without preparation, can deserve to be printed, and read too with pleasure : and yet there are a great many persons,

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sons, that would be much deceived, if they were to apply the first of these opinions to themselves, that might be right enough in applying the second. They may believe they should write well, if they writ as well as they speak ; but they cannot believe themselves capable of doing it without a very groundless presumption.

To know precisely what opinion to form upon this matter, and to be in a situation of passing an exact judgment upon some persons of my acquaintance, who talk with the utmost ease, and, at the same time, with no less elegance and propriety, I could wish we were able to recover that lost art, of writing in characters as fast as one speaks. When Mrs. *de ****** made me a visit, I would put a writer of that kind behind the hangings : I would then try to set her understanding at work, and engage her to talk upon some subject she was most mistress of. Perhaps, as I said before, when I came to read what my scribe had collected, and which had given me so much pleasure in the hearing, I should judge very differently of it, though, probably, I should think it very fine.

And now, if I was to publish some of these ingenious and learned conversations, taken off this way, perhaps I might give the world something, which, without costing any thing to the authors, would be worth

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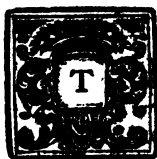
more than all the labour'd productions it was master of. And perhaps, also, such a collection as this, with nothing in it but what these gentlemen had said without study, and merely by way of chat, would outdo every thing they could compose themselves in their studies, let them take what time and pains they pleased about it.



O F



OF THE
QUALITIES
Necessary for
SOCIETY.



HERE are persons of a cold and heavy imagination, with a good deal of genius at bottom, and with somewhat close and reserved in their manners and conversation, that yet have a very good heart. Whatever merit they have otherwise, there is but little of the agreeable in their acquaintance. You esteem them, but cannot love them much : and what is this but an acquaintance founded merely upon esteem without friendship ?

One might love such persons, notwithstanding one does not like them, provided they had the other qualities that are requisite.

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site. There are persons whom we love and wish well to, and whom we would do any thing to serve, that yet we do not like.

To give the social pleasure in its full perfection, a person ought to have a good heart, that displays itself in a gracious and affectionate behaviour, in obliging expressions, and somewhat of that winning, insinuating way, that imposes upon us so agreeably in your well-bred people, who can assume it at pleasure. He should also have a share of parts, which, moderately animated, might enable him to bear a part in conversation, and diffuse that vivacity through it, which is its grand beauty. Reservedness has the air of ill-nature, and gravity of dulness.

Your close, reserved people, that are good at bottom, resemble those trees, that bear excellent fruit, but have nothing pleasing to the eye : they are more for use than shew. And those that have parts at bottom; with a cold, slow imagination; that animate themselves with difficulty, but that shine with great lustre when they are animated ; are like those perfumes, that never diffuse their odours, till they are set on fire.

O F



O F
C R I T I C I S M
U P O N
W O R K S of G E N I U S.



S it is possible to have taste without genius, or, if you will, the talent of judging without that of performing ; it is certain, that a person may know the faults in a work, and even have a right to point them out, and correct them, without being capable of doing better himself : so that the answer is very just, which the man-hater, in *Moliere*, makes to a poet, whose verses he had been criticising, and who desired him to make better himself.

*I might, by pure misfortune, make as bad ;
But should be very loth to have them seen.*

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A person may then, I repeat it, criticise a work without being able to write better. We may criticise the most excellent works, since there are none that are absolutely faultless ; but then our criticism ought to be accompanied, not only with a great deal of tenderness and good-nature, (without which it is not allowable upon any work whatever) but also with a particular respect to the author that is the object of it, since he must be acknowledged to be a master of qualities far superior to those which give us a right to judge of him. A good critic is very valuable in his kind, but the man of genius is of a much higher order.

A great many of those who are capable of making a just judgment upon the works of others, without ever having written themselves, are, in some measure, the dupes of their own discernment and good taste : because they perceive the faults of a work, they imagine they should have avoided them. The kind of merit which they have, deceives them into an opinion of that which they have not. They conclude, if one may say so, from judging well, to performing well ; a consequence false upon more accounts than one.

For, in the first place, it is not always true, that they would have kept clear of the faults into which others have fallen ; and it is still less so, that they would have per-

perceived them in a work of their own, because they have in another person's.

We examine the works of others, with a secret desire of finding faults in them : and this malicious intention wonderfully enlightens and assists us to discover them, if there really are any.

Our vanity is another help to us. We are fond of giving such an account of the books we criticise, as may do honour to our judgment. Now censure answers this end a good deal better than praise.

At the very best, we examine them without any partiality, any prejudice in their favour, without being sway'd either by interest or inclination, except that of judging exactly. But where the case is no worse than this, yet still we discern the bad with more ease than the good ; because it is of itself, and in its own nature, more easy to be perceived. Setting aside the inclination of the heart to seek it, the understanding always discovers it with most readiness.

The case is widely different, if it is an intimate friend, a person we love and esteem, that consults us upon his performance. We desire then, indeed, to know the faults of it, that we may make him sensible of them ; but we are still more desirous not to find them : and this second desire always, in some measure, obstructs the effects of the first.

One

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One half of our friendship defeats the other.

But, if it is our own work that we have to do with, if it is no less a friend than ourself that consults us, how much stronger must the imposition necessarily be then ! Compared with self-love, the most tender friendship is but indifference. And thus, a fault that we should have found at once in another's work, would escape us in our own, and, perhaps, appear a beauty to us.

I once accompanied a young author, that went to read a piece of his to another author of very celebrated character. The latter made me perceive, to a miracle, all the faults of my friend's performance. I could not help admiring the justness of his criticism. What an exact taste ! thought I : What fine apprehension ! What a perfect acquaintance with the rules ! After this, he read us something of his own. I was surprised, in the midst of the greatest beauties, to find some very considerable faults in it ; and the event convinced me afterwards, that I was not mistaken in my judgment ; for the very passages, that I disliked, were generally disapproved, when his piece was published. I took the liberty to tell him my opinion. He answered me with a great deal of good-humour and complaisance. But I could not bring him to own any thing, nor did I think he at all dissembled with me. I saw plainly,

plainly, that he spoke from his heart. For my own part, indeed, I had not much reason to expect, that he should defer much to my opinion: but it was the same thing afterwards; neither the judgment of the public, nor the reasons of the critics, were able to undeceive him. Just as penetrating and enlightened as he appeared upon my friend's work, just so blind did he seem to be upon his own. I came away astonished at such a fantastical mixture of light and darkness in the same person. I have seen a thousand instances of the same nature since, and am no longer surprised at them.

But, in the second place, I will suppose, that critics perceived the same faults in their own works that they do in other people; Does it follow from thence, that they would always have corrected them? Do they flatter themselves, that they should be able to correct every thing they dislike in the books they read? It often happens, that the author has failed in such passages, either through the shortness and deficiency of his art, or sometimes for want of genius, and by no means always for want of taste and judgment. A person must never have writ any thing himself, to imagine it is easy, or even possible, for a writer to correct all that he knows is faulty in his piece; and that a good author never publishes, till he thinks he has left nothing to a review. This is

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is a happiness that belongs only to bad authors, or, indeed, to none. I am not saying merely, that a good author, when he has done his best, would still wish to have done better; and has still doubts, whether he might not improve upon himself. I am not speaking only of those passages in his work, which, tho' in reality secure enough from censure, yet he could be glad to make more worthy of praise. I am not speaking, I say, of these, but of plain downright faults, such as he is most perfectly and fully convinced are faults, and which yet, with all the pains he could take, he was not able to correct.

But, in the third place, though it were true, that we should have kept clear of the faults which we observe in the works of another person, yet it does not follow, that we should have succeeded better upon the whole. For, first of all, perhaps, we should have fallen into other faults, and those more considerable ones; and, in the next place, we should not, perhaps, have had so many beauties in our work, as there are in that we criticise. The same turn of mind which removes us farther from some faults, make us more liable to others, and at the same time sets us at a greater distance from some particular kinds of beauties.

But, lastly, tho' a person were capable, not only of observing the faults of a piece, but even of correcting them, of putting real beauties

beauties in their room, and adding still other new ones to those of his author ; I say, notwithstanding all this, yet, still, all he could claim over his author, would be a superiority of taste, by no means a superiority of parts and genius. He may be capable of doing every thing I have said, and yet not be capable of producing such a work, as this, which he has corrected, first came into his hands. He might not have been capable of laying the plan, of arranging the parts, or of imagining those original beauties, which gave him the hint of those he has since added.

A person may correct the work of another very well, and yet not be able to produce any thing of his own worth correcting.

A person once quoted that common maxim : *It is easy to find fault, but hard to do better.* Yes, added M. de M. *It is hard to do but as bad.*

II.

It would be happy for an author, if he was never to have any judgment passed upon him, but by such as were authors themselves ; and if they would pronounce according to their natural apprehensions, and real sentiments ; for we must not imagine, that they always think of a work just as they speak. A spirit of emulation often makes them express themselves with a great deal of contempt upon things, which in their hearts

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hearts they have a good opinion of. They would be much more indulgent than those who are no writers, if they were but sincere.

Nay, sometimes their envy inspires them with so much malice, and makes them so blind to the merit of their rivals, that they say many things to their prejudice, with a good degree of sincerity ; a sincerity more detestable than falshood itself, because it argues more ill-nature.

III.

That a man of moderate abilities should be looked upon as a great man by his inferiors, is a thing very natural, and what frequently happens. Yet, sometimes too, he is not so well thought of by them, as by his superiors, who, having more judgment, and less prejudice, see him just as he is.

IV.

The middling sort of writers are common enough in the world of authors ; but men capable of making middling writers, are very scarce among men in general ; even among those who think they have pretensions to genius and learning.

A writer of this sort is a person but of a moderate genius, compared with men of the first rank ; but is often a considerable one, compared with the greatest part of those
that

that take upon them to judge him with so much pride and severity.

Methinks I could say to these insolent race of men ; Ah ! gentlemen, let me beseech you, do but think of the mischief you do yourselves, by this imperious manner of criticism ; these contemptuous airs ; this magisterial tone in which you deliver yourselves ! The persons you set so low, are infinitely your superiors. What, then, I pray, are you, and in what rank must we place you ?

If you would acquire a just taste, study the rules, read the excellent models, hear the men of genius, attend to the reasons with which they support their opinions. But, if you would bring yourselves to a candour of disposition, much more valuable than judgment itself, study yourselves ; know yourselves ; and then your criticism will be equally good-natured and judicious.

A sense of your own inferiority will abate that of the faults which you may find in works you examine. By this means, you will read with more satisfaction. That disdainful delicacy of yours only serves to diminish your pleasures, without doing you any honour. The man that is pleased with nothing, is equally to be pitied and despised. Forbear, then, to pull in pieces, as you do, the works of authors. Begin with suppressing the effects of your own unreasonable

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able dislike : I mean those harsh and insolent expressions, *That vile book ! That wretched piece !* and other such-like forms of speech, so apt to raise resentment even in those who are not at all concerned in them. Be somewhat backwarder to find fault, than to commend. Let it appear, that when you blame, it is with reluctance. Let your expression always be a little below what you think ; and not quite so strong as your impressions. Good-nature will quickly pass from your words into your opinions. Beyond this, I have nothing to recommend to you. Do but only get the better of your vanity. I say again, Know yourselves ; be sensible of your inferiority, and you will neither be so difficult, nor so severe. Perhaps, when you have learnt this lesson, there may then be need to caution you against an excess of easiness and indulgence ; for that is the point to which a just acquaintance with ourselves naturally brings us.

V.

It will be said, it may be, that authors are apt to be too much affected by criticism ; but there is much more reason to be astonished, that they are so little affected by it as they are ; and that there can be found such numbers of writers hardy enough to publish their works, and to submit themselves to the examination of a capricious mul-

multitude, composed, for the most part, of persons little qualified, but, nevertheless, as forward to judge, and as peremptory in their opinions, as if they were sure never to be mistaken.

It is true, the bulk of readers make a tolerable judgment enough upon works of wit, taken in the gross ; but then they judge wretchedly upon the detail ; and whilst a majority among them shall agree to say, a work is good upon the whole, there shall not be any agreement in their judgments upon the several parts of it, upon this or that particular passage in it. It cannot, therefore, be pretended, that every new author still flatters himself, that he shall escape criticism, and that it is this gives him assurance to print. There are not men in the world blind enough for this, be their prejudice in their own favour ever so strong. It is impossible they should be ignorant of this prodigious vanity of judgment I have been speaking of.

It is uncertain, when a person prints, whether he shall succeed or not ; and whether he shall have a majority of votes on his side : but it is certain, that he will not have them all. There are books enough, that are universally despised or forgotten ; but there are none that are universally approved of, at least at the time when they first appear, and while they are yet new. It is not, com-

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monly, till after the death of the authors, that they have full justice done to their works, and that they are rated at their just value. In all times, the most valuable works have been criticised, in a manner very mortifying to their authors. *Has Racine published one tragedy, upon which there was not printed some criticism, that degraded the piece to the rank of middling performances, and concluded to place the author in the same class with Boyer and Pradon * ?* In short, let an author that publishes be ever so certain, that his work will meet with praise and approbation, he is still more so, that he shall be censured and found fault with : from whence it follows, that the apprehension of censure gives him less pain, than he receives pleasure from the prospect of praise.

And, for that matter, this way of thinking is very reasonable. Praise is, in reality, more glorious than censure is mortifying ; and a work upon which there may be said nearly as much good as bad, always does honour to the author of it. If it was not that authors think in this manner, with regard to the different judgments their works are liable to, it is evident we should have no authors at all.

It is nevertheless true, that this dread of criticism, and especially of the malicious,

* *Critical reflections upon poetry and painting, by the abbot du Bos.*

satirical, and contemptuous kind of it, makes impression enough upon some persons to hinder them from writing at all, or, at least, from printing what they write; and if it was a means of deterring only persons without genius, or such as had only a very common one, it would certainly be a great happiness. It would rid us of the mob of writers, as *Montaigne* calls them. But they are usually men of the best genius, that this terror has most effect upon; because such have, at the same time, both the largest share of that modesty, which makes a person distrust himself and his productions, and also most of that generous pride, which gives a person so quick a sensibility of that ridicule which is so easily thrown upon the very best things. Hence it comes, that there are so many talents quite buried and useless to the public.

It will be said, perhaps, that an author ought not to be much mortified by a sorry piece of criticism, that is published against him. But, alas! it is a mistake to imagine, that they are the dunces only, that are concerned in running down a great performance; and that it is not only your poor, heavy, tasteless critics, that appear against such a piece. Let us hear again the abbot *du Bos*: *A cabal composed of several persons, among whom were some equally considerable for their genius and their quality, had entered*

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tered into an agreement to cry up the Phædra of Pradon, and to run down that of Racine. The conspiracy of the Marquis de Bedmare, against the republic of Venice, was not laid with more art than this, or prosecuted with more vigour. I allow the judicious writer I have been quoting, that this famous confederacy was not able to hinder the public from admiring *Racine's Phædra*, after the fourth representation of it; and such will always be the fortune of good works. Their success is never more than retarded. But, whilst an author is waiting for that success, and even in spite of success itself, how many epigrams shall there be handed about, full of ill-nature, and yet full of humour! how many criticisms very unjust perhaps, but yet very ingenious! Nay, I will go further, and say, How many criticisms very unjust, and yet very sincere, on the part of their authors! And this, now, is the most mortifying thing of all to an author, to find that some of those very persons, whose good opinion he would set the highest value upon, are not in his interest, but are gone over to the party of his enemies; and this without giving him any reason to suspect them of ill-nature or insincerity. Doubtless, these are strokes that he must feel very sensibly, at the time that he appears to be most unaffected with them, and receive them with an air of the greatest indif-

indifference. It is an humiliation to him in the midst of all his glory, an inward vexation, that embitters all the satisfaction which he had received from the good success of his work. I have seen people of good sense, that upon reading some of the remarks and epigrams, that are published on these occasions, were astonished to think, that there were men in the world of so little feeling, as to expose themselves to such insults ; for so they called them.

It might be easy for persons in authority to hinder these libels, and satirical verses ; and it would certainly be their duty to permit no criticism, but such as might be useful to the public, without being injurious to authors. But could they be able to prevent, in the same manner, all is said by word of mouth ? Can they restrain men in the extravagant liberty they take in judging ? Can they deprive readers of their pretended privilege of speaking as they please, upon a work that is become the public property ? It would be in vain for them to attempt it. Their power does not extend so far. So that all that can be done in this case is, to remonstrate with these merciless critics, who seem only to read books in order to find faults in them, and who, by their manner of speaking, would make those that never heard them before, believe, that they had some particular enmity against the author. I say, All that is to be done is, to re-

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monstrate with these men, and represent to them, not only the injustice of their conduct in respect to the persons they fall upon in this manner, but also the injury they do themselves, and the good things they deprive themselves of, by discouraging excellent geniuses from writing at all, or, at least, from making what they write public. But the truth is, advice of this sort will not reform the world. The pride and ill-nature of the human heart will always render it ineffectual upon the greatest part of mankind.

VI.

How! says a person in a company, where they had been reading some passages of a work, that had a mixture of great beauties and great faults in it; How could a man of so much genius as M. de *****, put such sorry things into his book, and let them stand there too? Surely, it is past all comprehension. Write something yourself, replies one of the company: you may then give occasion for the same question to be asked, and by that means, perhaps, you would find your problem solved.

VII.

Criticism is easy, and it is odious too, for this very reason; because it is usually taken up altogether in exposing and heightening faults. If critics, when they publish their reflections upon a play, that has had a
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run, or a book, that has given general satisfaction, had but the candour to observe the beauties in it, and skill enough to make them be perceived by others ; if they would make it their business to enlighten the judgments both of authors and readers, instead of diverting the one at the expence of the other ; in a word, if criticism was a rational examination of works, in order to discover equally both the good and the bad in them, it would be a sort of writing not unbecoming men of the highest honour to be concerned in, nor below the care of the greatest geniuses.

However, to dissemble nothing, this principle, That criticism is an easy thing, may be very properly turned upon authors themselves : and they may be told, that the less glory there is in perceiving some sort of faults, the more shame there is in committing them.

VIII.

When it is commonly said, that it is from posterity alone that we are to expect an equitable judgment upon authors, and their works, it must not be understood of a posterity very remote : for, if it is, the maxim will not hold. We are too near the authors of our own times, and too far off those who lived many ages ago, to form a just judgment of them. We hardly do full justice to our cotemporaries, and we are apt to shew favour to the antients. Whilst an au-

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thor is yet living, all the fury of criticism is sure to be let loose upon him ; but then he has, on the other hand, his admirers, that extol him to the skies with the most extravagant commendations. After his death, all this assuages and grows calm, both the censure and the praise, and they come on both sides to think with more moderation. But it is not long that the public keeps here. Esteem for the author insensibly increases. His praises prevail, and posterity comes at length to look upon *him* as a kind of divinity, whose cotemporaries had disputed his title to the character of a great man. So that if we consult experience, it may be said, that good works are commonly rated at their just value, in the age immediately ensuing that of their author. Succeeding ages do not usually make so true a judgment upon them, because they judge too favourably. The reputation of good works always gathers in its passage, which, perhaps, is less a proof of the excellency of the works themselves, than an effect of that disposition there is in most men to admire antiquity. It is natural, that the public esteem for a good work should still be growing up, to the instant that it is surpassed by another in the same kind. Every day that passes, without producing some performance equal or superior to that which is in possession of the public esteem, ought to confirm it in that possession, because it proves still more and more the

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the scarcity of those talents, which the first work discovers its author to have been master of. But now, it is natural for us to proportion our esteem of talents and works according to the scarcity both of one and the other. It is also reasonable, that we should not be too hasty in giving the preference to a modern work, how good soever it may appear, before an antient one that has been consecrated by the suffrage of several ages. But, instead of keeping within these just bounds, we are apt to give a little too much into a prejudice on the side of antiquity, and that several ways. Sometimes we dare not venture to profess our opinion of a modern work, and are afraid to own, that it pleases us beyond an antient one. Sometimes it shall really please us less than it ought to do, by reason of that bias to antiquity, which insensibly and unaccountably weakens the impression such a work makes upon us. Sometimes we deliberately and wilfully resist our own pleasure. And, finally, we often judge directly contrary to the impression a modern performance has actually made upon us ; whereas we ought only to suspend our opinion upon it. These, now, are the reasons why an antient work, though inferior to a modern one, may for a great while hold the first place in the public esteem.



*Why the Sight of those whom we have
offended is disagreeable to us.*

I.



WE do not always hate those who have injured us, but we almost always hate those whom we have injured, in proportion as our injury has been more or less considerable. We suppose, that those whom we have offended, hate us, because they have reason to hate us; and we hate them again, on account of this supposed or real hatred they bear to us. It seems unreasonable, that we should hate those who have cause to hate us, because, in truth, we have nothing to hate them for; and it is but seldom that we hate those that hate us without a cause.

With whatever shew of friendship those whom we have injured may carry themselves to us, we cannot think but that they still preserve some resentment of the injury we have done them; and if they should at length give us such convincing proofs to the contrary, that it would be impossible to doubt

The Offended, why disagreeable. 91

doubt of it ; we then look upon them in the same light with those to whom we have considerable obligations. But we do not equally love persons that we have too much obligation to ; at least, we do not see them with pleasure.

The presence of those whom we have offended, and who have generously forgiven us, is almost always disagreeable to us, tho' we should not directly hate them ; because it recalls to our remembrance the idea of a fault committed, and a favour received ; a fault more mortifying, on account of the favour that accompanied it. We see, in such persons, our benefactors, and the witnesses of our misbehaviour.

II.

We should never do an injury ; not only because it is unjust in itself, but also, because it is a source of mutual resentments. We sometimes break with those whom we have injured, without their breaking with us ; we hate them, before they have ceased to love us. There are many occasions upon which it might be very proper for a person to say, I beseech you forget and forgive the injury you have done me.

An injury received, and pardoned, is, to the injured, a title of superiority over the offender.

III. The

III.

The same motive which makes us love those whom we have obliged, sometimes makes us love those who have injured us.

The best means of bringing ourselves to love any person it is our interest to love, is, to do him a kindness.

The most amiable of all persons in our eyes, is, the person whom we have obliged, and who is grateful upon the account ; provided, however, that his acknowledgments are not such as to acquit him of his obligations to us.

A gratitude truly refined, as it is boundless, if I may say so, in point of affection, so it should be limited in its effects.

To love to do favours is a thing very laudable, when the motive is good, and very rare from any motive whatsoever. But to love those to whom we have done them, is a thing very natural, and no way laudable. It is the mere effect of the grossest kind of self-love.

Though it be no merit to love those to whom we have done favours, yet there is some in doing favours to persons, in order to love them. Virtue, to gain its ends, will sometimes make use of means that depend upon our passions for success. It is the effect of self-love to take a pleasure in being beloved, and this is common to all men. But it bespeaks a goodness of heart, and a refinement of temper, to delight in loving.



O F T H E
Effects of H A B I T.
O F
S E L F - L O V E,
A N D O F
M O D E S T Y.



WE accustom ourselves to every thing more or less. We contract an insensible familiarity with all sorts of objects, the most pleasing as well as the most disagreeable, till we come in time to receive but a faint impression from them; and this is true, not only with regard to material and sensible objects, but also with respect to such as are purely intellectual.

It is commonly said, Marry a pretty woman, and marry an ugly one, and at six months end it will be the same thing. This
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is evidently an exaggeration. But it would be still a much greater to say, Marry a woman of wit, and one that has none, and it will be the same thing. Doubtless, you will say, The exaggeration would be infinitely greater in the latter case. I know it would be said, and I am for straining nothing further than it will bear. But it is certain withal, that there is truth in both these assertions ; and it is undeniable, that if we grow familiar with beauty, we do the same with wit. The impression that is made upon us by the qualities of the mind, decays less than that which we receive from the charms of a fine person ; but still it decays. We come in time to be quite unaffected with a fine person, that we have continually before our eyes ; and we come to be much less affected, than we were at first, with a fine understanding we daily converse with. But tho' we no longer receive any sensible emotion from the sight of a fine person, yet it does not cease to appear a fine one ; neither, again, do we lose our esteem for a person of merit, by long living with her ; but we become so much better acquainted with her worth, tho' we have not so lively an impression of it ; for there is in esteem, as well as in love and friendship, a sentiment that is precisely esteem, and nothing else. At its first commencement there is a vivacity attends it, which abates by little and little, like that of love itself, tho' that
which

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which is the essential part in esteem, subsists always, and sometimes increases.

It follows from hence, that if we could see ourselves with as much indifference as we do other people, we should have a less lively impression of our own merit than of theirs ; for the merit of another can never be so familiar to us as our own.

Suppose a man of sense, without self-love. There is no such thing in reality. All the world have self-love : but the supposition, however impossible, may nevertheless serve to shew us what should be, and what is, in effect, the case with those who have least of it.

Such a person, now, being once grown familiar with himself, would esteem himself afterwards but with a faint kind of esteem, nearly the same that he would have for a person he had lived with some time in a strict intimacy. He would be less struck with the productions of his own mind, than those of other people. He would admire more abroad than at home ; for admiration springs from surprize, and surprize from novelty. Admiration is commonly but a first movement, which does not last, and is succeeded by the cooler sentiment of esteem. Thus, the greatest praise that we can give an object, is to say, it is always new. How charming is this garden ! cries a person, as he enters the *Thuilleries*, where, perhaps, he had been a thousand times before. What!

says

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says another to him, is not your admiration over yet? One would think you had never been here before. The *Thuilleries*, replies he, are always new to me. By saying so, he ascribes the highest degree of beauty and perfection to them, and justifies that admiration of them which so long a familiarity had not exhausted. A moderate degree of beauty, with the help of novelty, may make itself admired; but there is nothing less than perfect beauty, that can appear always new.

Nothing ought to appear less new to us, than our own merit. It is something very imperfect, and something that is always in our sight. But now, as our self-love makes us believe it a good deal less imperfect than it is; so this is a sort of love, that never abates at all of its vivacity. It is the most constant of all our passions, as well as the most flattering. If any character present itself to our observation, that at first view would go near to make us doubt whether our own were equal to it, and almost extort from us a secret confession of our own inferiority, this confession is presently retracted. This kind of inconstancy, which, as it were, detached us from ourselves, is but very transitory. Our eyes, dazzled at first, recover themselves again. The charm of novelty is broken. Our admiration sprung but from an imperfect knowledge of the object. We had considered it but on one side. Upon a
closer

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closer inspection of it, we discover faults in it, which had escaped us in the first view ; and upon the whole, and all things duly considered, there is scarce any person whose equal we do not think ourselves, and with whom we should care to exchange understandings. We allow, indeed, that some persons have their advantages in certain respects, and are masters of some qualities we could wish to make our own ; but then we flatter ourselves, that the balance is on our side in other things : and I am not speaking now of such persons as we might compare ourselves to, with some shew of probability ; but of those who are most confessedly our superiors in the opinion of the whole world. If our self-love was but a little out of the way in its comparisons, it might be borne with ; and it would not be worth while to split hairs about the matter : but the most immense distance is frequently as nothing in the eyes of this principle. Like fortune, it will take a man out of the dirt, and set him upon the throne. A great man shall frequently be more sensible of the superiority of another greater than himself, than a person, very inferior to them both, shall be of his inferiority. Probably, *Pradon* thought himself fewer removes from *Corneille*, than *Racine* did ; and I am sure, that whilst *la Rue* and *Gaillard* looked upon father *Bourdalone* as inimitable, there were other preach-

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ers that thought themselves not far from being his equals.

But it will be said, when self-love blinds men to this degree, it becomes a folly every whit as extravagant as that of the fool in *Horace*, who fancied all the vessels that came into the port belonged to him, and so looked upon himself as unquestionably the richest man in the whole place. A folly, beyond all dispute, is this blindness of our selfishness; and yet, every day of our lives, we see infinite instances of it. But how many more should we see, if every man would but venture to speak of himself as he thinks! The greatest difference there is between your common fools, and the fools of self-love, is this, that the first speak as they think, whereas these others have sometimes the art, and the prudence, to conceal one part of their folly: not that they know, or have the least suspicion, that they are mistaken in the good opinion they have of themselves; but that it is an established point with the world, that, to make discovery of such sentiments, be they ever so just, is both odious and ridiculous. The conceited man, while he talks modestly of himself, thinks he is only suppressing disagreeable truths.

When I say, that there is scarce any person whose equal we do not think ourselves, it must be understood in two senses; first, and most properly, of those who are proper parallels

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parallels to us. The word *parallel* does not signify precisely the same thing with the word *equal*. Two orators, or two poets, in the same kind of eloquence or poetry, are proper parallels to one another, tho' they may not be equals. I fancy, therefore, this illusion of our self-love which I have been speaking of, may be expressed well enough by this maxim :

We almost always think ourselves superior, or, at least, equal, to our parallels.

Secondly, tho' an historian does not think he has the talents of an orator, or an orator those of a poet ; yet they easily look upon themselves to be equals to one another ; not only because each of them thinks himself as great a master in his own kind, as the others can be in theirs ; but also, because each, being prejudiced in favour of the kind he has made his choice, looks upon it as the most noble, the most useful, or the most agreeable ; and above all, that which requires the most uncommon talents to succeed in : and it must be owned, this delusion is not so ridiculous as the first. It is more excusable to be mistaken upon the dignity of any particular kind of merit, than upon the share which one has of it one's self. If the value of different talents was to be decided according to the greater or less use they were of to mankind, it would not be difficult to know which deserved the preference ; but it would be unreasonable

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to go by this rule, because it would lead us to prefer the lowest and most common talents, such as are not usually called by that name, before the most noble and sublime. It is from some such view of things as this, that we have that plausible maxim ; That the men of genius in all professions are brothers.

I have heard, that a famous comedian, who has been dead some years since, used to assert very extraordinary privileges upon the foot of this principle, and claim a right of ranking himself with the heroes, whose persons he represented, and the greatest poets, whose compositions he rehearsed.

However, this professional pride, if I may call it so, may have its use. Men are full of false ideas, which it might be dangerous to deprive them of ; for they are sometimes the springs of their best actions. The good that is in them is bound up with the bad, and it would be difficult to correct the one, without destroying the other. Morality, I mean a morality purely human, will never be able, any more than physic, to cure all distempers.

II.

It is said, I know, that the people who are apt to be most conceited of the dignity and excellence of their profession, are commonly but indifferent masters of it. Doubtless, the less they excel in it, the more it
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is their interest to hold up the honour of the profession itself. Besides, this kind of conceitedness is almost always a mark of a weak judgment. All this is true ; but it must be observed this while, that as there are several professions, that require more fire and imagination, than reason and judgment, it is possible, that there may be the greatest ability in one of these professions, together with the extremest and most ridiculous conceit of its dignity. A player, a poet, may extol their art above every other, and yet excel in it. That silly prejudice of theirs only lessens the man, and you can infer nothing from it to the prejudice of the player, or the poet.

III.

Self-love is not in the same degree in all men, and I would not be understood to comprehend all in what I have said here and elsewhere of its effects, tho' I sometimes express myself in a general and indefinite manner. However, the exceptions are not so many as one would at first imagine. And he who accuses me of exaggerating, if he makes his judgment from what passes within himself, let me tell him, is either guilty of dissimulation, or has not studied himself as he ought.

I am ready to own it, and the reader would easily discover it, if I did not, that I have taken from my own heart a great

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part of that which I have said upon self-love. I find myself full of it. I experience every day its power, and its artifices : perhaps this confession may serve still to increase it ; or, perhaps, it is no more than one of its effects, and I may be in the condition of those centinels, who, whilst they give notice of the approach of the enemy, are more exposed to his assaults than those they alarm.





OF
SIMPLICITY,
AND THE
Different Kinds of MODESTY.



AS common as this self-love may be, which so prodigiously magnifies us in our own eyes, by diminishing the size of other people; there are, notwithstanding, persons of singular merit, and to whom that merit is yet, in a manner, unknown. You must acquaint them with it, and prove to them their superiority. They are as much strangers to their own good qualities, as other men are to their faults. They assume too little, just as others do too much, for want of knowing themselves. They are astonished, they are shocked, with commendation. They look upon it as an effect of flattery or ignorance; and, for this, you are just so much the freer to praise them. But now, from what motive is it, that we love this simplicity, this ignorance of their own merit, which charms us in great men? Is it always a virtuous one? Doubtless, it is not.

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We love it from a principle of interest, and without esteeming it. We are apt enough to say, that this simplicity is frequently nothing else but a want of discernment, which is compatible enough with a great share of merit; that it sometimes appears to be modesty, when in reality it is only sincerity: and it must be owned, that this is not always said without foundation. It is well known what *Fontenelle* said of *la Fontaine*, That he would never have thought himself inferior to *Phædrus*, if he had not been a dunce. *A humorous expression*, says *M. de la Motte*, but significant enough, and which very finely expressed the character of a superior genius, that mistook his own merit for want of considering himself with proper attention. This is what is properly called simplicity.

There is a considerable difference, therefore, between simplicity and modesty; for the modest man is perfectly acquainted with his own worth, and would be guilty of insincerity, if he prized it at less than it is; but tho' he knows his own merit, yet he does not at all assume upon it. The rich man knows, that he is rich, and the great man cannot be a stranger to his greatness; yet there are some of both sorts, that are modest in the midst of affluence, and at the top of grandeur. They despise not those, to whom fortune has not been so liberal. The man without quality or estate shall be admitted to

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to their friendship, if he otherwise deserves it ; and not merely to the name, but to the thing itself : nor is it to maxims of philosophy upon the real goods of life, that such persons are obliged for their modesty. They are commonly indebted to nothing else for it, but a good natural disposition. In the same manner, a man of merit may find his superiority to others in point of wit and genius, without pride, and without despising his inferiors ; for the bare knowledge, that others are our inferiors, does by no means imply a contempt of them. And in this, now, consists the true modesty, in knowing precisely what one is, without endeavouring to make it felt by others ; in making a true estimate of one's own worth, and yet passing one's self for less ; and this not merely in our words, but in our whole conduct and manner of behaviour. There is, however, a modesty of language, and the obligation to it is indispensable. But it consists rather in forbearing to praise, than in directly depreciating one's self. It consists, like prudence, of which in one sense it is a part, in suppressing what is not proper to be said, and not in saying what is false. A lye would produce an effect directly contrary to that which we had in view. It is always suspected of false modesty.

II.

The proud and conceited think too well of themselves ; the humble not well enough ;
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the modest just as they ought; and the simple, properly speaking, do not think of themselves at all. They make no comparison between themselves and other people. When they prefer others to themselves, they prefer a known to an unknown. They take their own inferiority for granted, without giving themselves the trouble to prove it. They have genius, and do not know it; and if they had none, they would not know they wanted it.

III.

He who conceals the pride that his merit inspires him with, has only an outside modesty. If he conceals it thro' a goodness of heart, out of respect to other people, from a conviction of the unreasonableness of such pride, it is a virtue. If he wants only, by this conduct, to make himself still the more esteemed, his modesty is but a more refined kind of pride, and which it would be so much the more dangerous to make a discovery of.

One may therefore distinguish three sorts of false modesty, of which, to speak properly, there is but one blameable; and I call them false, only because they are frequently confounded with what is truly and strictly modesty. The first of these is simplicity; a pure ignorance of what one is, and what is one's real merit.

This ignorance of our own merit is very amiable, and very laudable, when it proceeds
only

only from the want of reflecting upon one's self; from not thinking to compare one's self with others, in order to know our true worth. Such was the modesty of *Fontaine*, with regard to his fables, in the sense of M. *Fontenelle's* expression.

Sometimes it proceeds too, as I have said, from a want of light and discernment, which makes a person judge ill of himself, just as he may judge ill of others; and in that case it is a defect of merit, rather than an accession to it; an imperfection in the understanding, rather than a good quality in the heart. However, we love this last sort of simplicity, which hinders persons from seeing themselves, if I may be allowed the expression, a good deal better than that which keeps them only from valuing themselves. We are fond of that part of their virtue which is useful to ourselves, rather than that which does honour to them. We love the effects of virtues, and not the virtues themselves; whence it follows, again, that we like in others the bare qualities, better than what are, in a strict sense, the virtues. They do the owners less honour, and at the same time are more vigorous, and more certain in their effects, which is the main thing we consider. Thus our self-love is always in more safety with those that are simple, than with those that are only modest. There is always danger, lest the latter, as they know their own superiority, should come in time

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to make us feel it. If they do not, yet they lay us under a sort of obligation ; and obligations are things that nobody is fond of.

IV.

The second sort of false modesty, the most common, and the most known, is that odious vice, to which custom has, in fact, given the name of false modesty. Perhaps it might be better called, pretended modesty, However, let us consider the effects of it. We never commend a person with a good will, but where we can commend his modesty : and if it is true of esteem, that it has its source in the heart, as well as the understanding, it is still more true of praise. When pride happens to accompany uncommon talents, and great qualities of mind, it does not always prevent esteem, tho' it commonly lessens it, by the ill will it begets towards the person that is the object of it ; but it almost always prevents praise. We may therefore esteem, but we scarce ever praise, those whom we do not love ; and we love none but the modest. This is what an acquaintance with the human heart, and an experience of the world, teach us : and upon this the proud man builds the whole system of his conduct. He endeavours to make you believe, that he is simple, tho' he knows he is not so ; or, at least, that he is modest, in order that you may be the more ready to believe, and to say, that he

is

Of Simplicity and Modesty. 109

is valiant, generous, witty, all which, perhaps, he is : and to obtain the praise that is really his due, he sets out with usurping that which he has the least pretension to.

V.

Lastly, the third sort of false modesty, which, nevertheless, has a good deal that is very commendable in it, like the second, conceals a secret pride ; and it is for that reason I call it false in one sense : but, then, it is a pride which the person who has it combats and disclaims. It is a pride kept under, tho' not destroy'd ; a pride forced, if I may say so, to silence, and chained down to the bottom of the heart, as a furious monster, that would ravage every thing, if it was let loose ; yet still it subsists, and is making incessant efforts to gain its liberty. The resistance which defeats these endeavours is a sort of continual victory, resembling (a poet might say) that of *Jupiter* over the *Titans*. They are not yet quite extinguished by the thunderbolts : they lie groaning at the bottom of the abyss, under the weight of accumulated mountains, which still heave with the violence of their throes. But a mighty hand still keeps them down, and presses them upon the monsters with a weight proportionable to the efforts which they make for their enlargement.



O F T H E
N E C E S S I T Y
Of following one's
G E N I U S.



HERE are authors that were born with a good share of parts and genius, who, for want of having followed their genius, or, at least, confined themselves to it, have failed of that reputation, to which they had fair pretensions. The occasion of their contempt is sometimes the love of change, and the distaste of too uniform an application ; but most commonly the ambition of succeeding in more than one kind of writing, and by that of adding new lustre to their reputation. But would it not be better to acquire some reputation in the lowest kind of literature, than to be despised, or but indifferently thought of, in a kind more noble and difficult ? It is well known what *Cæsar* said, That he chose to be the chief man in a village, rather than the second in *Rome*.

II. There

Of following one's Genius. III

II.

There are writers, who, together with great skill in the languages, are masters of a talent for translating; for, I own, this talent is something above the most perfect knowledge of the languages. But, this while, they are but little capable of thinking themselves, and upon their own proper bottom. And yet they aspire to be originals. They are above translating. They must produce of their own. And what do they produce, but works cold and lifeless, full of trivial and false thoughts, such as have nothing valuable in them but the style? So they are lost in the croud of middling authors, with all that would have qualified them to shine in the rank of translators.

For instance, M. *Dubois*, of the *French* academy, has prefixed to his beautiful translation of St. *Austin's* sermons, a preface, in reality, well written, but very ill thought, as M. *Arnauld* has clearly shewn, in the judicious criticism he has published upon it.

Besides the great facility of succeeding, when a person proportions his designs and labours to his abilities, there is yet another advantage in this conduct; and that is, that we commonly run only the hazard of remaining unknown in case of ill success. But there are some subjects which we cannot by any means touch with safety. There are some kinds of writing in which persons cannot publish without exciting the curiosity of
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of great numbers ; and consequently without exposing themselves to contempt, if they do not succeed.

III.

It is the perfection, and not the difficulty, of your works, which will make them valued, and sought after. You have writ well in a kind that is useful and agreeable. From that time you commence a good author in the eye of the public. You are known, and, if your works are of the first merit in their kind, you are reckon'd among the great writers.

It is true, there are a sort of men, whom we may call the *appraisers* of wits, who will think and say, perhaps, that what you have writ does not at bottom argue a first-rate genius ; that a middling performance in some certain kinds often requires better parts, than the best performance in another kind more easy, and more common. All this may be true : but the public, with whom your concern is, and from whom you expect your recompence, does not enter into these niceties. You have given it good things equal or superior to those of your rivals. This is sufficient for it. Your place is appointed you among the great men, or at least among the considerable ones. This last name is equally given to all those who have excelled in any art or science whatsoever, altho' these arts and sciences, and the different parts of
any

any particular art or science, are not all of equal dignity.

IV.

When we reckon up the great poets of antiquity, we reckon *Anacreon* as well as *Homer*, *Catullus* as well as *Virgil*, *Martial* as well as *Lucan*. The goodness of the works is thought a balance for their want of number, and their want of length.

M. Bruyere is one of our first authors in prose. *M. Boileau* is one of our first poets, and, perhaps, our very first versifier. Yet the *characters* of the first, and the poetry of the second, make but a moderate volume. *La Fontaine*, and *M. Flicheire*, would not be less immortal, tho' the one had composed only his fables, and the other his funeral orations.

There was, probably, a great difference between *Tully*, *Horace*, *Livy*, compared each with each : but this is not the point in question, when we are adjusting the precedence of authors. Their works are equally good in their kind. This is the thing we take notice of, and almost the only thing we consider. Ask a man of learning, which of these he thinks best of, and he will answer you according as he looks upon either of them to be more or less perfect in their kind, and not according to the degree of genius which was required to bring them to the perfection they are in. This last is a point that never enters into his thoughts :

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he will not think your question is to be understood in this sense, unless you explain yourself precisely to this purpose.

I have been saying, that we judge of the merit of an author rather from the degree of perfection there is in his work; compared with those of the same kind, than from the degree of genius it supposes in him. Experience vouches the fact; and, indeed, it ought to be so, while men are what they are. The merit of works, which is the point in question, consisting in the pleasure they give us, the author of those which please us most ought to be looked upon the author of the greatest merit, and the most valuable writer. But you will not please, especially in the higher kinds of writing, if you come much behind those who excel in them, whatever genius it may require to bring you where you are arrived. There is no room for the merely good, and still less for the indifferent, in works of entertainment, where there is nothing good but the best.

This maxim, as I have been insinuating, is still more true in regard to the superior kinds of writing, the works of greater length, and greater difficulty, than in regard to those which are of a less compass, and which we look upon almost as trifles. Mediocrity is more insupportable in a tragedy than in an epigram.

V.

A tragedy, and a small comedy of one act,
are

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are brought upon the stage at the same time. The comedy succeeds, and does a good deal of honour to the author. The tragedy is damned, and does no honour to the poet, but with a man of judgment here-and-there in the pit. Every body else is sick of it, and despises it of course. Ask them which of the two pieces they would rather have been authors of; they will not believe you are in earnest. But you stand to it, and, perhaps, force them to perceive, that the tragedy, altho' it deserved the fate it met with, has, nevertheless, great beauties in it; that this kind of writing is of infinite difficulty; that there must be genius to succeed in it ever so indifferently, &c. They will own all this, perhaps: they will do the author this justice. But what does he get all the while by this confession, extorted, as it were, by force, from tired spectators? The company flocks the next night to see the comedy; every hour brings it new applauses. It will be brought upon the stage as long as there is one; whereas the tragedy must appear no more, for want of an audience. In a month's time, it shall not be talked of: in a year, you shall scarce know there was such a thing, nor shall there survive enough of the memory of it, to furnish an epigram upon the author. It is easy now to see the reason of the different success of these two pieces. The one, as having more difficulty, supposes more genius; or, at least, a sort of

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talents that is more scarce in him who composed it ; the other is more perfect in its kind. I have a higher opinion of the author of the first, but the second is better in himself, and for that reason is, in reality, more valuable. I had rather be capable of having written the tragedy ; but I would rather, in fact, have written the comedy.

VI.

As for those who are moved by the desire of more than one sort of glory, to pass from one kind of writing to another, they are not only liable to fall short of the reputation they are in quest of, by going out of their sphere, but also to tarnish that which they have already acquired.

It is impossible, says the multitude, It is very difficult, and very rare, say the men of judgment, for the same person to succeed in several kinds. Thus, the more you have been admired, and the better you have succeeded in one kind, the less are mankind disposed to admire you in another, and to believe, that you are able to succeed in it. By this means, your past glory is turned to your disadvantage. I allow you, this is but a prejudice, and you will still be the more admired, if you should, in reality, shew yourself to be master of the new talent you pretend to ; but, perhaps, this very prejudice itself shall have effect enough to hinder the public from perceiving, that you have it,
or,

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or, at least, from perceiving it in its full extent. The effects of prejudice are astonishing in persons of the best understandings. I do not mean, however, that these will not do you justice : but you must not expect it immediately from a great number of them. The force of prejudice shall prevail so far as to blind them upon the merit of your new work. Altho' good, they will take it to be bad, and maintain it as such upon the strength of this reasoning : It cannot be ; therefore it is not.

VII.

Besides, there is in your conduct an air of presumption, which displeases the public, which prejudices it against you, and makes it desire your fall, even against their own interest.

We are often tired with admiring the same things : this is mere distaste. We are still sooner tired with admiring the same person : and this is ill-nature.

Very well, you will say ; in attempting to please the public in a new way, I have nothing to fear but its ill-nature ; whereas, by keeping on in the old one, I expose myself to its disgust and ill-nature both together.

It is true ; but then take this along with you, that when you exact from the public a new kind of admiration, you excite its ill-nature in a very different manner from what you do, when you demand only the conti-

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nuance of an admiration it was, if I may say so, in the way of giving you before. Then, you will say, one must not write at all.

Perhaps this might be the best way, after a certain time, and when you have gotten a certain degree of reputation, unless a person was sure of surpassing himself ; for if your new work be no more than equal to those you have already published, it will add but little to your fame ; and if it is inferior, it will diminish it considerably. The speech that is so commonly addressed to the sons of *Mars* and *Apollo*, Go, repose yourselves under the shade of your laurels, is not so much a compliment paid to their glory, and an invitation to them to enjoy it, as a piece of advice you give them to preserve it. It is as if we said to them, Go, rest yourselves : you have leave : you have acquired a fair title to repose, and it is for the interest of your glory, that you take it. We intreat it of you, in regard to your long labours. Let prudence also persuade you to it. Do not expose to new dangers and fatigues, a health and a life, that we hold so dear ; nor hazard upon an uncertain event, a reputation which ought to be so precious to us.

This, indeed, is not so strictly a part of my subject ; but I am naturally brought back to it, with this reflection. At a time when it would be safest to give over writing intirely, is it prudent to begin to write
in

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in a new kind ? When it is uncertain whether we have strength enough left to go on in our old way with success, is it probable, that we have enough to succeed in a new one, that we have never tried before ? But, at what time is it, for the most part, that authors are tempted to pass from one kind of writing to another ? Is it not when they are tired with going so long in the same track, which supposes that they have been some time in it, and, consequently, are past that bloom of age in which the faculties are in their full strength and vigour. They have already arrived at that more advanced age, in which the gains they have made in point of judgment, but ill supply the losses they have suffered in their imagination. How then should they succeed, especially if, as it frequently happens, they pass from a more easy kind of writing to a more difficult one ?

VIII.

It is true, one might name some authors, that, after seeming to be exhausted in one kind, have appeared again to renew themselves, as it were, in another. There are some, that have afforded an instance of this more than once, and have left us in doubt which was their principal talent. *Horace* has written both familiar and sublime poetry. *Virgil* has given us the most charming pastorals, and the most noble heroics. And to come to the moderns, the late *M. de la*

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Motte, in the opinion of the most severe of his critics, has left us excellent performances in several kinds ; and he has been blamed, not so much for having written in too many kinds, as for having written too much in each. There are, however, beauties in his least productions. But tho' some of them had less spirit in them than they have ; yet this would not be a sufficient reason to dispute the variety of his genius. The evidence which we have to this point, from that part of his work which is excellent, cannot be destroyed by that which is indifferent, or even that which is bad in them. And without allowing this to pass for a rule, where would the great *Corneille* be ? Where would all authors be ? Are there any that have not produced some indifferent things, nay, bad ones, in the kind for which they have the most unquestionable genius ?

The *French* academy hath at length found a continuer of its history, a successor of *M. Pellisson*, in one of our best translators.

The historian of *Charles* the XIIth is the same man to whom we owe the glory of having in our own tongue an epic poem, which will bear a second reading with pleasure.

M. de Fontenelle — But I have said every thing, when I have named him. His name calls up the idea of an universal genius.

These are some unexceptionable instances, besides others I might have mentioned. They are, however, but an inconsiderable number,

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ber, in comparison of those on the other side. They are no more than exceptions to the general rule, that talents of one sort exclude those of another, and that the greatest geniuses are the most limited. But it is seldom that a person can, without pride, believe himself an exception; or, that he can, without imprudence, depart from a conduct authorized by the practice of the greatest men, and still better justified by the fall of those who have not observ'd it.

IX.

But there are yet other inconveniencies I have to put before the eyes of the writers I have in view, in these reflections. Suppose me, therefore, talking to one of them. Consider, I should say, consider, I intreat you, before you enter upon a new sort of writing, that you will make yourself enemies of all those to whom you become a rival.

It is but too well known how far the spite of a rival, that has been mortified, may go; and if the reputation of an author that is attacked, does not always suffer by the fury of his rivals, at least, the peace and tranquillity of his mind does. A man of a good heart has no consolation to his vanity, from the hatred that he incurs; and I know nothing that carries greater discouragement to the profession of an author, than this hatred of rivalry, the most unreasonable of all hatred, and yet the strongest.

These

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These new enemies you have acquired, before you were entered into their line, were very unwilling to commend your performances in another kind. They had no interest in finding fault; perhaps they had some in commending you. But the very day that you pretend to divide their honour with them, it will not satisfy their vengeance to oppose with all their might the success of your last works. They will retract the praises they bestowed upon your former labours: they will revive the criticisms that were made upon them heretofore: they will league themselves with your antient rivals, to pull them to pieces without mercy.

Let it be said, if you please, that there is glory for all; but this must not be taken too literally. There is no sharing the glory of others, without lessening it a little. *Corneille* is a very great writer, but he would have been still greater without *Racine*, the only person that stands in competition with him. The jealousy of authors too, especially those in the poetical way, is always greater than there is occasion for in this case; though, to speak the truth, they are not so much guilty of blindness, as they are of meanness and injustice. *Corneille* saw, and he could not help seeing, that *Racine's* reputation rose somewhat above his own; but he could not have been offended at it, without being scandalously unreasonable.

X. But

X.

But now, if you succeed in spite of all these difficulties (I am still speaking to my author) this will be but a trifle for you to suffer. The applauses of the public will drown the noise of the critics. Their clamours will be but as another kind of applause. The fiercer they are, the more they betray the chagrin they proceed from, and, by consequence, the excellence of the work they attack. The worst of it is, that all this I have been telling you, will happen, even if you should not succeed. The attempt will be punished as severely as success: only, then, the matter will be a good deal fairer subject for your critics; for such you will have, were it only on account of your reputation. And the public will be on their side against you. The acknowledgment which they owe you for their instruction or entertainment, which your first works have given them, will not hinder them from laughing now at your expence. Scarcely will there be found a few good-natur'd people to say, That a person of your merit ought to be treated with more decency and respect.

XI.

I have said, that your envious folks and critics would go back as high as the works by which you made your entry into the commonwealth of letters. But the public is forward enough of itself, to abate the esteem

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esteem it had for you on that account, since you have given it occasion to lower its personal opinion of you. This is unreasonable, I will allow you. Your first works are always what they were : your last have made no alteration in them. But they have alter'd the disposition of the public towards you ; and their opinion of writings depends, in a great measure, upon the inclination they bear toward the authors. Now you have sunk their opinion of yourself, by publishing at this time a sorry performance. They knew well enough before, in general, that your genius was not universal ; but, properly speaking, they did not reflect upon it. They considered you only on that side which you had shewn to them, and did not concern themselves, whether, upon turning another, you would appear the same or not. In a word, the esteem they had for you was pure, without mixture, and in some sort indefinite ; but now it is limited and mixed with contempt. You have made proposals of what you could not perform ; you have made them sensible of your proper bounds. They know perfectly, that you have not this or that particular talent ; and, what is worse, that you thought you had it. Nay, perhaps they know, that you think so still ; that you rebel against their authority ; that you are ready to re-enter the lists from whence they have excluded you : but this, now, would be the highest pitch of dis-

disgrace ; because it could proceed from nothing but the most detestable pride, or the most pitiable blindness.

XII.

That which helps chiefly to keep you in the delusion you are under, is, that, perhaps, there are great beauties in your work ; beauties of a kind in which you have at other times succeeded. But beauties misplaced cease to be beauties, and become faults. Art has no principle more constant, better supported by experience, and of which we can give better reasons. That which pleases us in an epic poem, displeases, and ought to displease, in a tragedy. What, therefore, can you expect in a work, which not only wants the essential qualities in such a performance, but is also faulty, by means of the finest parts in it ? What would you have one say of it, but that it is bad ? And, for yourself, can one carry one's indulgence farther, than to look upon you as a person of more wit and genius, than judgment and taste ? And, after all, it does not become you to be out of humour with the public, which will sometimes, in spite of any body, be too severe and ill-natured in its judgments.



O F

PREPOSSESSION.



WE may distinguish four sorts of persons upon the subject of prepossession. The one are scarce ever prepossessed but in the right; and yet their prepossession, well founded as it is, never determines their judgments. These are the good judges, and the few.

The others are almost always prepossessed in the wrong. They judge always according to their prepossession, be it well or ill founded; and by this means, they scarce ever fail to make wrong judgments. This is the case with the many.

Between these two sorts of persons are those, who, like the first, scarce ever prepossessed but in the right, and, like the second, judging always in consequence of that prepossession, do make also frequent wrong judgments; for a prepossession may be well grounded, and nevertheless be found false. Such are, for example, the prepossessions grounded

grounded upon general rules. They are true in ordinary cases, false in some particular ones, that are an exception to the general rule, and, by consequence, equally well founded in both one and the other ; for it is reasonable to build upon general rules, so long as we keep within the bounds of a mere presumption only : but as the exceptions from general rules are frequently very numerous ; the judgments made in consequence of presumptions, which have no other foundation but these rules, are often false.

Lastly, we may observe a fourth sort of persons, upon the subject of prepossession ; and these are those, who, being easily prepossessed, and of consequence often with a wrong opinion, do as easily correct their prepossessions, as they at first took them up.

II.

It is said, Weak minds are commonly opinionative. This is true in one sense. There is a particular weakness of mind, which occasions opinionativeness ; but there is another kind of weakness, and, perhaps, a more common one, which produces inconstancy of opinions, and is the occasion, that persons never adhere firmly to any one. They quit the true for the false, and the false for the true, indifferently. They had taken up an opinion without reason. They lay it down in the same manner.

We

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We sometimes change our opinion, because the reasons upon which we first embraced it, are effaced in our minds. Error would not be able to support itself in their presence ; but it easily prevails over a mind it finds, in a manner ; unarmed.

The generality of men are but ill-qualified to distinguish good arguments from bad ones. There needs but little art to impose upon them. They are put off with words and gross sophistry. But even among men of a just understanding, there are several, upon whom good arguments make a very transient impression. You have always to begin anew with them. They have no faculty, *M. Nicole* says, of holding the truth when they have once got it. Hence that saying, That the populace are always of the opinion of him who speaks last to them.

They deliver themselves up to the wind of human opinions. *They are carried about with every wind of doctrine*, says the scripture, speaking of these men so unsettled in their opinions. The force and justness of this expression has introduced it into familiar language. Thus we say of a person remarkable for his levity, He is a weathercock, that turns with every wind. The comparison is perfectly just. It is pity it is not more noble ; but the meaner it is, the better it serves to shew us the despicable nature of this weakness.

III.

We judge by prepossession two ways ; with and without examination. Sometimes we will not take the pains to examine at all : sometimes we believe we have got evidence sufficient to dispense with it ; and the judgment almost immediately follows our prepossession. At first, this is frequently but very faint ; but in some minds its progress is very swift, and it becomes in an instant a judgment in all its forms, and above submitting to an examination, and so fixed and determined, that no examination whatever could alter it. But, what, now, in fact, is the case with the man of prejudice, that does actually examine ? How come persons, even of sense and candour, to make so many false judgments, judgments palpably and notoriously false, after spending a great deal of time and pains in examination ?

Blinded and enlightened at the same time by their prejudice, they see all the reasons that favour it. They see these in their full force, but they see none else. You suspect them of ignorance or dissimulation, and they are only under the power of prejudice. In this state, all the principles of good sense and equity vanish from the mind. They condemn the innocent, and acquit the guilty.

But what now is the source of the greatest part of our prejudices ? If it was only the weakness of the human mind, and the im-

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perfection of our knowledge, there would be as much got as lost, in having persons subject to prejudice for our judges in any case. They might judge as well right, as wrong; as well for us, as against us; as well in favour of truth, as of falshood. But the source of prejudice is as much in the heart as in the understanding. Hence it comes to pass, that we not only take up more prejudices against men, than for them; ourselves against others, and others against us (in which, perhaps, there may be nothing but what is right); but also, that we have such an inclination to form, and to receive, these prejudices, that we entertain them with such pleasure, and take still more in communicating them. And it is by this means, that a prejudice, unjustly conceived at first, becomes often the cause of an infinite many judgments equally false and injurious.





O F

PRIDE, *and its* Effects.



HERE are two sorts of pride. The one is a pride simple, true, and natural. which shews itself without disguise, and takes the shortest way to its end. A person thinks well of himself, and he speaks of himself as he thinks. He declares, without ceremony, that he has wit and genius ; and he says so, not so much, because he would have others believe it, as because he believes it himself.

The other sort of pride is a pride that covers itself with falsehood, lying, and dissimulation ; but is not always able by these means to prevent a discovery of its weakness ; a pride which makes us earnestly desire the esteem of others, and, in consequence of this, to take all possible measures for appearing to them different from what we are ; being inwardly convinced, notwithstanding all the deceits of our self-love, that we have no way to escape their contempt, but by imposing upon them.

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This sort of pride, if it comes to be discovered, is extremely odious. We bear with the first sort, and give it a kind of allowance, where it has any foundation ; and if it has none at all, it is only ridiculous. It is a kind of enthusiasm we pity, a folly we laugh at, and which we take delight sometimes in flattering, for the sake of the pleasant scenes it entertains us with. I have known of this proud kind of madmen, downright *Don Quixots* in their way, and that you could despise without hating. But those who manage their pride by dissimulation, are equally hated and despised when they are known, which they generally are very soon, because all men are proud more or less. There are some vices a person discovers so much the more easily in others, as he is at the greater distance from them himself ; but this is not the case with pride. The more one has of it one's self, the sooner one perceives it in others. Pride is the greatest and most subtle enemy that pride has.

We must not confound the simple and natural kind of pride, I have been speaking of, with that grosser sort which shocks and offends us with its insolence : though the grossest kind of pride is a good deal less odious than this refined sort, this pride of dissimulation ; which, indeed, observes some decencies to our face, but infuses such a falshood into all a person's words and actions;

as

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as shocks us beyond measure when we come to discover it.

The proud person, of the character I have in view, always attentive to persuade others of that merit in him which he is conscious he wants, has no concern about speaking and acting naturally. If you talk with him upon any point, or ask his opinion upon any new book, you must not expect, that you will get out of him what his own real thoughts are upon the matter, or that he will answer you according to his natural sentiments. He is afraid to deliver himself so freely as this, but censures or condemns just as censure or commendation will do him credit. He has no positive opinion upon any thing, and does not speak so much for the sake of saying what he thinks, as to make you believe he thinks well. In a word, he would fain give you an advantageous opinion of himself. This is the rule by which he goes; and, in order to follow it, he will talk differently upon different occasions.

His common method is to produce the reasons, *pro* and *con*. upon a question; not so much for the sake of opposing the one, and confirming the other, as to let you see, that he knows both.

He provides himself of general principles. These he delivers gravely, without ever coming to an application, which he supposes it easy enough to do, but knows well enough it would not be so easy to extricate himself. And

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if, at length, you bring him to explain himself more precisely, and to espouse some particular opinion ; be it ever so false in his own judgment, he will maintain it, but almost always in generals.

Sometimes he shall give up a point to you, but with intimations, that it is a condescension of his politeness ; that he has unanswerable arguments he could produce, but that it would take up too much of his time, and lead him into points that might be somewhat too abstract, and would require an attention of which all the world is not capable.

He has also general forms of censure and commendation, composed wholly of terms of art. He is particularly fond of such as dispense with the detail of proofs, and are most proper to make you sensible of his superiority over the authors he pronounces upon. For instance, one of the most common judgments he passes upon works just published is, that they have nothing new in them. I have a notion (says a person of this turn) I have read all this before ; tho', adds he, I cannot say much of my reading, and less of my memory, and have always spent most of my time in thinking for myself.

And yet, to gain the character of learning, as well as parts, he will quote you sometimes passages as taken from the very first originals, or at least from works little known, and which
are

are only for the use of the learned. When he talks of the antient oracles, he will not quote *M. de Fontenelle*, but always *Vandale*, tho' he has never read him : but if it is a beautiful thought, a fine expression, or an ingenious argument, that he has an opportunity of introducing, he never quotes for it at all, but gives it you as his own.

He is accustomed never to seem surpris'd at any thing ; and let a thought you propose to him be ever so new and uncommon, if it appears to him just and solid, he can immediately reply, with the most easy air imaginable, I always thought as you do.

But the persons of this character, who have really parts, and a command of words, can perform yet more extraordinary exploits in this way, and carry on their impositions with much greater advantage to their own glory. If they happen to meet, for instance, with persons of more parts than knowledge, and fall into conversation with them upon some point they themselves have just read some good book upon, they shall immediately seize the opportunity to deliver themselves in an abridgment of it. You hear them with admiration, and applaud them to the skies. But if they deserve some commendation for their ingenious manner of repeating what they have read, surely they are worthy the lowest contempt for that extravagant vanity, which prompts them to pass for the authors of it.

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I recollect, upon this occasion, that I had once a good deal of difficulty to undeceive a friend of mine, who fancied he had been in company with *M. Fontenelle*. A man of parts, in a company he had been in, (and whose name I have since learnt) had talked a good while in a way my friend was wonderfully delighted with, upon the subject of the pagan oracles. When the company broke up, he came to me, and told me, he wished for me just now at *Madam de *****. If you had been there, says he, you would have been still more entertained than I was. Then he gave me an account of the conversation. Never had he met with a man of so much learning and eloquence at the same time. With that, he enlarged upon the obligations we were under to persons who were so communicative of their knowledge; and in this light, added he, this person, I found, was willing we should consider what he had said; for, at the conclusion of his discourse, he told us, He had been giving us, in half an hour, the fruits of several years study. At this word, I suspected the whole adventure; but I took no notice to my friend, only told him, That if he had any curiosity to be perfectly acquainted with the subject of the oracles, I would lend him a book equally solid and entertaining. Upon his accepting my offer, I gave him the history of the oracles, by *M. de Fontenelle*. He read it eagerly, and brought it me again the next

Of Pride, and its Effects. 137

next day. I heard yesterday, said he, all that I have been reading ; but I am not at all surpris'd. It was undoubtedly *M. de Fontenelle* himself, that talk'd so : to be sure, he knows his own book by heart ; and, indeed, he talk'd in the style of a book. I know *M. de Fontenelle*, replied I : he talks as well as he writes ; but he does not go about repeating his own books in company. Besides, I do not believe he ever talk'd half an hour together. You are certainly mistaken : it could not be *M. de Fontenelle* you saw yesterday at *Madam de *****. How ! replied he, with some warmth, Is a person who gave us an exact abridgment of the history of oracles by *M. de Fontenelle*, who recited quotations in it, which I perfectly well remember'd when I saw them again in the book, and who told us, moreover, that we had been hearing the fruits of several years studies, is not this *M. de Fontenelle* ? No, said I, it is not. I suspected it yesterday, and I am sure of it to-day ; but to convince you of it yourself, tell me — So I ask'd him some questions, which, at last, undeceiv'd him ; but he could not, for a long while, recover from his astonishment. Is it possible, cries he, that there can be a man of so much assurance as this pretended scholar of mine ? What scandalous behaviour, and, at the same time, what great imprudence ! My friend was so enraged, that, I believe, he would have dealt pretty

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pretty plainly with him, if he had fallen in his way just at that time. He would no more allow him to be a man of parts.

This was unreasonable ; but, however, natural enough. The injustice of him who would usurp a praise which is not his due, often puts us upon with-holding that praise from him, which he has the most rightful claim to upon other accounts. And in this, we see how different kinds of injustice are punished one by the other. Thus pride rises up against pride ; for it must be owned, that there always enters a little of this principle into the indignation that it raises in us ; and that the pleasure we take in humbling the proud, is very much in proportion as we are proud ourselves. I do not by this intend to accuse my friend of pride. He had, undoubtedly, in the usage I have been mentioning, enough to provoke a person of the greatest modesty and humility in the world.





O F

GOOD HUMOUR.



Good share of reason, with a proper stock of good humour, makes an accomplish'd character for society.

The first of these qualities would not be sufficient without the second; not only, because it is good humour that diffuses through the commerce of life some of the greatest charms of it, but, moreover, because it is that which secures us the constant use of our reason. It is by virtue of good humour, that he who is endued with it, is exempt from those movements of passion, those sallies of humour, which often make the man of the most reason act like one that has none. It is this which preserves in a person that cool blood, that tranquillity of soul, which, permitting him to see things as they are, or regulating the impressions they too naturally make upon us, sets him always in a condition of hearing the dictates

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dictates of reason upon every occasion, and of conforming himself to them.

Good humour assists us no less in bringing others under the conduct of reason, by the manner in which it has the art of recommending it to them. It is the sovereign power of persuasion, the grand strength and noblest ornament of truth.

Good humour is almost always a natural quality, and the effect of temperament: yet sometimes too it is a virtue, and the fruit of our endeavours. It may be acquired, at least, to a certain pitch; but whatever it costs, it can never be bought too dear. The advantages that attend it are a prize that will amply recompense the utmost pains we can take to attain it. Tho' one should not be able entirely to subdue, yet there is always an advantage in overcoming one's self. Every victory brings its reward with it; and when our passion is once abated, and we consider whither it might have brought us, it is a very pleasing satisfaction to us to think, that it hurried us into nothing contrary to reason.

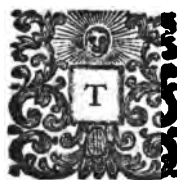
II.

There are good temper, and a complaisance, which are no other than weakness, bashfulness, and cowardice; a want of presence before those who impose upon us, and a dejection of heart before those whom we fear. We are obliged to use management with some persons who would not manage them-

themselves, if we were to drop one word that displeased them. It is dangerous to provoke those who presently fly out upon the least thing that thwarts their inclinations. There are persons now, that always yield upon such occasions ; that keep an humble and respectful silence, and oppose nothing to the most unjust passion but tears and intreaties. Their resentment does not dare to shew itself even in the least emotion. And all this is done naturally, in a manner, without efforts. What temper, you say, what admirable patience ! But you are quite mistaken ; and if you would undeceive yourself about this pretended meekness, put it to some other trials, where it may run no hazard by discovering itself. Do you yourself, whom this person does not stand in fear of, and may contradict without danger ; you, whose good humour he is acquainted with, and whose ill humour he does not care for ; I say, do you but make a trial yourself upon this person, that appears to you so modest, and so gentle : try to mortify his vanity in something ; find something to censure in his conduct ; charge it with some slight fault ; differ from him in your judgment upon some trifle : you will soon learn at your own expence, to be of another opinion : you will find nothing but eagerness, and impatience, and pride, where you imagined you had met with a temper either the most happy in itself, or the most happily corrected.



A
CHARACTER and DEFENCE
OF
BALZAC.



THE fine genius, the great writer *Balzac* ! What a treasure are his works to our language ! What purity, what neatness, what force of style ! What number, and what harmony ! What nobleness of thought and expression ! What variety of turns ! Nothing weak, nothing negligent, in so great a number of works ! In vain might one seek for two volumes in folio of any single author, written with such continued elegance. He is not even, indeed, throughout, as might well be expected ; but he is every-where equally laboured, equally finished. It cannot be said of him, as it was of *Homer*, That he slumbers sometimes. It is nearer the truth to say, He sleeps, and has fine dreams. Rather than slacken his pace, he sometimes leaves his road, or takes

a compass beyond the point he had in view. There is good and bad in him, but there is not, properly speaking, any high and low. He never creeps; never falls; or else his falls, if you give that name to his faults, are only an extravagant elevation. In a word, he offends by excess, rather than defect. His morals, in matters of wit, as he expressed himself, were too indulgent to this kind of faults; and if one may judge from his conduct, it is plain, that he formed his morals in this point, according to his interests. Qualified for reaching the noblest subjects, by the majesty of his style, he has not always the art of adapting himself to the common and ordinary ones. By being unseasonably sublime he becomes turgid. His magnificent expressions appear gigantic, for want of being in their proper places. To shew them in their full beauty, they should be employ'd in other services more worthy of them. There may be found, in his letters, patterns of the noblest kinds of eloquence; and collections might be made from them, for composing discourse of the greatest weight and solemnity: and if I might presume to talk of him in his own style, the same materials which he has so prodigally lavished upon the houses of private persons, might serve for erecting the palace of a sovereign.

He was a master of delicacy as well as force of style, and abounds with strokes M.

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de Fontenelle need not be ashamed of. But as his sublime frequently runs into the bombast, so his delicacy is sometimes too near affectation, and has nothing of that simple and natural air, and that remarkable justness, which distinguishes the delicacy of the illustrious writer I just mentioned.

Balzac had likewise a thorough acquaintance with polite Letters, and was far from the character of an illiterate genius. The good authors in *Greek* and *Latin*, in *Italian* and *Spanish*, were familiar to him. He was a perfect master of their languages; and we have some *Latin* verses of his, that might be owned by *Santeuil* and *Commires*. His writings are embellished with the most beautiful passages both of antients and moderns. But as great a lustre as they cast, they do not eclipse his own proper thoughts. He enhances the value of every thing he quotes, and the beauty of the passage itself strikes us less than the happy manner in which he has applied it.

Yet is he fallen; this writer so celebrated, this great panegyrist, who has received more praise than ever he bestowed, who heard himself pronounced by the unanimous suffrage of mankind, the most eloquent of mortals, and who has been since styled the father of the *French* language; the master and the model of all the great men who succeeded him. His very age is almost now grown into disgrace with us, for the approbation it be-

bestowed upon him. He has scarce any readers left, but among those who read every thing, that has ever had any sort of reputation; who have a mind to inform themselves of the character and genius of the principal writers in each period; and who, if I may say so, study the history of the revolutions of the human genius in different ages. The polite world knows nothing now of these works, which were once its chief delight and entertainment. It would not scruple to call in question the taste of that famous assembly at *Rambouillet* house; and, perhaps, it may fare with *Balzac*, as it did with *Ronsard*, and some other authors, that appeared in *France* at the restoration of letters, and whose names only will be transmitted to posterity, perpetual monuments of the transitory duration of a great name! Doubtless, if they are yet interested in the fates of their memories, they would prefer a total oblivion to such a kind of immortality: they would envy the lot of that croud of sorry authors, that have appeared in all times, and who have passed thro' the world without being known even by their contemporaries.

Balzac has already experienced, in part, the fate of *Ronsard* and his companions; but his fall, perhaps, is not beyond recovery. It is possible he may lift up his head again. I should not be surprised to see it: I wish it earnestly; and I freely confess, whatever

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opinion

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opinion I may give of my taste by it, that *Balzac* is one of my favourite authors; that I have read all his works thro' with pleasure, and that I came to a second reading with inclination.

I agree, nevertheless, to several faults that he has been charged with; I am sensible of the exceptionable part of his character; and I just now pointed it out. I am greatly offended with that contrast between his subject and his style, and own, I sometimes think it quite ridiculous: but still, I cannot but be of opinion, that his beauties outweigh his faults; that his very faults themselves have their beauties; and that, besides, they are, in some measure, capable of being corrected. I sometimes amuse myself with doing him this service, and fancy it is with some success; and the pleasure I take in this employment, whether it is the effect of vanity, or what, greatly overpays me for the pains I bestow upon it. In one place, I vary the style by suppressing an antithesis, (which I have frequently no other dislike to, but as it comes at the back of several others) and so give it a more natural turn. In another, I soften an hyperbole, that is too harsh for the occasion; or, as I said just now, I look out some fitter place for it, apply it to another subject, and transplant it into some work of a different kind.

But my grand secret for correcting *Balzac*, or, rather, for saving the trouble of

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correcting him at all, and making him appear well in his present shape, is to change the title of his works ; for example, not to consider his letters as mere common letters, for, in fact, he never writ them with this view ; but as pieces of wit, which he has labour'd as much as any of his other writings. In these letters, you have neither news nor business. You see nothing of the friend unbosoming himself to his friend, and writing with the same familiarity that he talks. It was something else that was expected from the celebrated *Balzac*. I do not say, but he may have writ several letters of this sort, which we should think, perhaps, very fine if we had them ; but there are scarce any of this kind that remain in the collection of his works. Perhaps he was too much enamour'd with his more labour'd productions, to set much by those which had cost him but little, and had the least opinion of those of his letters which would have pleased the public most. However it happened, the greatest part of those we have are of the formal and studied kind, designed to be handed about in manuscript for a while, and afterwards printed.

But you will ask, How came he not to write some letters like those of *M. de Buffi-Rabutin*, and *M. de Sevigné* ? I repeat it again, they were letters of another kind, that were expected from him. It was required of him to produce, I do not say,

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something better, for these letters are perfect in their kind, but something more. It would not go down in his time, for an author of wit to write like a man of the world. It was expected, that his letters should be like academical exercises. The least negligence was sure to be criticised ; and even at this time of day, when the taste of epistolary writing is so different from what it was then, we pass a very different judgment upon the letter of a man of the world, and that of a professed author. We expect a great deal more exactness in the latter, and the negligence we affect to call so agreeable in the other, would in this be thought an unpardonable fault. It is written indifferently enough, we say, for an author. It is true, indeed, if it be studied beyond a certain degree, and carries the marks of labour upon it, we are apt to cry out, It favours of the author ; so that, in truth, there are no persons under such difficulties in letter-writing, as authors are. It is expected of them, that they hit a certain mean, which is neither easy to observe, or even describe exactly.

We have in *Sorel*, a cotemporary writer with *Balzac*, a passage that is a complete apology for him. He observes, that his first letters, which we now look upon to be his worst, as being the least natural, were much better received than the last. *It would be difficult*, says he, *to find the same objections*
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to these, as to the first volume he published. Yet the regularity of these last letters has not given them such a run as the first, which, with all their extraordinary flights, have undergone several impressions. This proves nothing but the inclination there is in mankind to novelty, and that an abundance of good things may sometimes tire us. But Sorel is mistaken in this matter, and makes a wrong conclusion. The relish men have for novelty, and their aversion to be pleased long with the same thing, had the least share in the different success of Balzac's letters. There is reason to believe, that the last would have met with still more, if they had been in the same style with the first; and that these again would have had less, if they had been writ as correctly, and been as really good as those that succeeded them. The first, taken in themselves, and abstracting from their being the first, were infinitely more relished than the other, tho' less approved. They appeared always more agreeable, even by virtue of their very faults themselves; and, in fact, there are faults of a certain nature in works of wit, which contribute to make them read with more pleasure, and which we censure only upon reflection.

Balzac, therefore, is very excusable, for having written in a manner the most likely to take with the taste of his own times; and he is much to be commended, for quitting that manner afterwards, at the risque of his

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success ; and, in fact, his success was lessened upon his growing correct. It is true, he is not yet correct enough for us ; but a reformation in matters of taste is commonly brought about by degrees, and is scarce ever the work of a single man, which is a great argument for indulgence to *Balzac*. It is only to be regretted, that he was not born twenty or thirty years later. We have lost a complete author, by his coming into the world so soon.

But one may further justify the taste of his letters, or, rather, himself for having written them in that taste, by those of the men of wit, who were his contemporaries, as *Coflar*, and some others. Their letters all seem formed upon the same model, and according to one common idea of the epistolary style. Even *Voiture* is not so different from *Balzac*, as we commonly think him. It is another turn of wit that we have in him ; but, at bottom, it is the same taste, because it is the taste of their age. The antithesis, and even the hyperbole, are equally the favourite figures of both. They run each of them after wit, and to say truth, after low turns and points. We find it, more especially, in the letters *Voiture* has most laboured, for they are not all laboured alike ; and there are several, which he certainly never intended to print. His genius led him to trifling, and he understood it well enough ; but, when he has a mind to write seriously, he

he gives into affectation and bombast, almost as much as *Balzac*. The more he endeavours to shine, the nearer he resembles him. The panegyric upon the *Duke of Olivares*, is in the same style with the *Prince* *. You shall find the same faults in these two works, and, to a certain point, the same beauties. I say, to a certain point; for, besides that it is agreed, that *Balzac* is more pure, more correct, more even, than *Voiture*, there is commonly a nobleness and grandeur in him, which the latter never reached, tho' he sometimes attempted it.

I do not intend by this to adjust the precedence between these two authors: there may be, perhaps, as much difficulty in trifling gracefully and delicately, as in reaching the sublime. Whatever advantages I here give to *Balzac*, I should not be at all surprised to hear it said, that *Voiture*, in that which is the distinguishing part of his character, is more original, more singular, and less easy to imitate, than *Balzac*. Every body has seen the two letters of M. *Boileau* to the marshal *de Vivone*, in the name of these two authors. I am persuaded, that the letter of *Voiture* cost him more than that of *Balzac*; and yet it seems to me to have less resemblance with its original, which is certainly a circumstance in praise of *Voiture*: perhaps, too, this may be, in some

* This is the title of one of Balzac's principal works.

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measure, owing to the particular turn and genius of the copyer, who might be less capable of falling into *Voiture's* manner, than into *Balzac's*. However that be, every style that is easy, I do not say merely to imitate, but to take off, to copy, is for that reason, in some respect or other, a faulty one. But such, now, is the style of *Balzac*. It is easy to copy, because it is too distinguishable, and too much of a piece. The same beauties recur too often in it, as they do in *M. Flecbier's*, which is certainly a fault.

To all this that I have been saying in behalf of *Balzac*, it will be replied, perhaps, That he was a good writer for his own age ; but that he is worth nothing in ours. This is true in one sense. *Balzac* ought to please us less at this time of day, than he pleased formerly, by reason of the change that has happened in the public taste : I will allow it. But if it is meant to insinuate, that the case of this author is the same with that of the first painters and poets, who, rude as they were, yet pleased ages as rude, that were acquainted with nothing better than their works ; and that he ought not to appear any thing above a middling writer, in an age so enlightened as the present, and so fruitful in good authors ; I say, if this is the design, it is intirely to mistake his character. There is, perhaps, as much art, and as much genius, in his works, as in any of those that have appeared since. There

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Character of BALZAC. 153

is enough, however, for readers of the most refined and delicate understandings; and if it were proper the world should grow still more refined, *Balzac* would only be a gainer by it. He may pass sooner for a sorry writer, than an indifferent one. This last appellation carries rather more contempt in it than the other. It always implies a mediocrity of genius in the author, to whom we apply it; whereas we frequently give the name of a bad writer to one whose taste and manner of writing do not please us, tho' we allow him, in other respects, to be a person of parts and genius.

It was not that *Balzac* was insensible of what was vicious in the taste of his own age. He distinguishes himself throughout his works as a very penetrating critic, and, particularly, nothing can be more judicious, than what he has written upon the famous poems of *Job* and *Urania*; but it was very natural for him, as I observed before, to comply with a taste which, on one hand, would more infallibly secure him the approbation of his cotemporaries, and which, on the other hand, he was completely furnished to succeed in; for this taste consisted in an inclination to be witty throughout, and wit was a thing that cost *Balzac* nothing. Some of those who have contributed the most to the re-establishment of a just taste, have no share with him for force and compass of genius; and, perhaps, we might have been
indebted

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indebted to him himself for this happy reformation, if he had been born with less wit, or, to express myself without ambiguity, with less of that turn of mind which creates a facility of giving an ingenious and brilliant turn to every thing we say. Let it be said, if you please, that this talent is always a kind of genius. I am only condemning the abuse, and not the thing itself; tho' I might plead the same right to rail against it, that a great many have, who decry wit only because they have none themselves.

It would not be proper to put *Balzac* into the hands of young people at their first entrance upon books. The reading of his works ought to be deferred to the second course of their studies. Till a certain age, the understanding is not ripe enough to perceive all his beauties, nor the taste well formed enough to discover his faults. *Balzac* thought a great deal, and in a very refined manner; for which reason he is not adapted to all capacities. He abounds in the antithesis and hyperbole; this is an essential fault in him. Yet even these faults would be apt to charm young people: they would strive to imitate him, and unfortunately would succeed but too easily, thro' the liveliness of their imaginations. They are not, as it should seem to me, the great writers that are the fittest reading for beginners. Those of a moderate genius, but judicious in their thoughts, pure and correct in their style,

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style, rather free from faults, than abounding with beauties, would be more proper for them, perhaps, and make them better models. Our first endeavours should be to form their taste, before we set about enlarging their genius. They should be put, at first setting out, in a direct and easy road, where they may proceed without guide or assistance. Never give them, if it is possible, the idea of a fault ; the very notion will be dangerous, in spite of all the precautions you can convey along with it. Never offer them beauties beyond a certain order, or trouble them with thoughts too elevated and refined. This can only serve to overpower the weakness of their faculties. You fancy, that, by all the remarks and comments you ply them with, you help them to distinguish, whereas, in reality, you only furnish them with talk. Depend upon this, that you cannot lead them much faster than they would go of themselves.





A
C H A R A C T E R
O F
Two Sorts of WRITERS.



Have been at the opera sometimes, when I have seen a young princess come in, whose natural charms were set off with the richest embellishments. The pearls and the diamonds sprinkled in her hair, and scattered over her robes, dazzled all that cast their eyes upon her. Perhaps I might have been better pleased to have seen her in a more artless dress; and, as I am not fond of splendor and gaiety, should have been more charmed with the graces of a noble simplicity. But, however I think on this occasion, that which dazzles one is something real; and if it is a profusion, it is at least a profusion of riches. The opera begins, and I cast my eyes toward the stage, where *Armida* appears, with her companions, almost the same kind of object I have
been

Of Two Sorts of Writers. 157

been just admiring. The actresses have strove to copy the princess in every particular. You see the same display of charms, or even greater; the same grandeur and magnificence in their habits. Vain outside all! and on my side, laughter and contempt. All this, that so dazzles me, is false and counterfeit. Their lilies and their roses, their gold and their diamonds, what are they all but mere paint and tinsel, and *Bristol* stones?

Balzac, Flechier, Bruyere, Fontenelle, and their sorry imitators, are the princess and the actresses.





O F

JUDGMENT and GENIUS.



IN a company where M. de **** was, an excellent critic; but who had never written any thing himself, the conversation turned upon a work which had appeared a few days before, and begun already to be very much talked of. M. de **** happening to say, That he had read it, the company begged he would be so good as to give them some account of it, together with his own opinion of it; which accordingly he did, in a manner equally just and agreeable. The whole company returned him thanks for his complaisance, and, after great compliments upon his abilities, unanimously reproached him with obstinacy for not writing himself, or, at least, for not communicating his labours to the public. The compliment was the most flattering that could be, and he replied to it with as much modesty as politeness; but as they persisted in pressing him upon the affair, I have studied myself, says he, and, I believe, am tolerably acquainted with
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Of Judgment and Genius 159

my own abilities. It is upon my conviction in this matter, that I have chosen the part of silence ; and, perhaps, I may deserve some little esteem upon the account. You see, added he, I do not pretend to any modesty in the case. You shall have my apology, or, if you please, my confession, in two words : if I had as much genius as it is possible I may have judgment, or as little judgment as I have genius and capacity, I would write. In the first case, I should produce good things ; in the second, I should not be sensible I produced bad ones. Between the men of wit and genius, whom the desire of reputation or the public good, together with a consciousness of their own abilities, induces to write, and the dunces, who write for want of knowing their own incapacity, there are some persons of good sense, who do not write, because they think they should not come up with the first, and because they would willingly be something above the second. I have no contempt for middling authors ; but, I own, I should not be fond of increasing the number of them ; and, indeed, how do I know, but I might add to the croud of bad ones ? You should never advise any persons to write, but such as run the risk only of passing for indifferent ; by no means such as at best can pretend to nothing more. Discretion forbids us to seek a place it would be a disgrace to miss, and no great honour to obtain.



O F

H A P P I N E S S.



WE are not ashamed to own we are unhappy, though we are often ashamed to give the true reason of it. We say, we are not happy; but it looks as if we were afraid to prove it. The feeling of our misery extorts this confession from us. We complain, in general, of our condition, but we seldom descend to particulars; at least, we never give a complete detail of them. There is always some reserve in our confidence, upon the subject of our uneasinesses; some mortifying circumstances we should blush to discover to the most intimate friend we had: and these circumstances are commonly the true causes of our misfortunes.

There is no difficulty, therefore, in reconciling complaints of this kind, indeterminate complaints, that are confined to such things as can do us no prejudice in the opinion of other people, with what is so often

often said, That men are fonder of being thought happy, than of being really so ; or, to speak more exactly, that they place a good part of their happiness in the opinion of other folks. We would fain be thought happy, because, to be happy, supposes the possession of several advantages, which usually command the respect and observance of the world, to those who are masters of them. So that, in reality, it is the shew of happiness, the power of being happy, rather than happiness itself, that we would be complimented with ; a vanity the most ridiculous that can be. If we would value ourselves upon any thing, it should be real happiness, and not the mere possession of those those things in which it consists ; for, besides, that these imply no merit in us, they cannot of themselves make us happy. The common people imagine, that all the great, and all the rich, are happy ; or, at least, that they may be so if they please, and that their happiness is not a thing at all meritorious in them, or for which they deserve thanks ; but this is a mistake. Whatever condition of life a person is placed in, it is not that which, properly speaking, makes him happy ; but it is the suitableness and agreement of our condition with our temper and dispositions, whether natural or acquired. There are some men so well turned for happiness, that they would have been happy in almost any condition of life, they could

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have been placed in. This great, or t'other rich man that is happy, and whose happiness we impute to his wealth, or his grandeur, would have been happy in the station of a mechanic, a peasant, or a beggar. In like manner, another shall charge his unhappiness upon his condition of life, who would have been equally unhappy in every other. Happiness is almost always the effect of constitution, and sometimes too the result of reason and constitution together. Our fortune contributes less to it, than is commonly imagined.

There is some foundation for valuing ourselves upon a happiness which is, in part, the acquisition of our reason ; and even when it is merely the result of constitution, and our reason has no share in it, that kind of make which disposes a man for happiness, always implies somewhat valuable in him ; somewhat that is a more reasonable pretence for vanity, than the possession of wealth, or the enjoyment of pleasure.

But you will say, there are fools that are happy, and are obliged to their folly for being so. I own, in some measure, they are ; but not entirely ; and, for a proof of this, let it be observed, that there may be two men attached to the same kind of folly ; the one shall be happy, and the other not. The fool of *Athens*, that *Horace* mentions, was not happy merely because he thought himself very rich. This fancy might have been

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as well a source of pain as of pleasure to him ; and his imaginary riches the cause of the most real disquietude. If his folly took a right turn, to use the expression, it was because it found in him a proper disposition for happiness. How many other *Athenians*, possibly, were there, as great fools as himself, without being so happy ?

That flow of good humour, that serenity of soul which multiplies all the blessings we enjoy, and supplies the place of those we want, which blunts the edge of the acutest pain, makes us bear it almost without discomposure, and, in the shortest intervals of ease, resume our ordinary pleasantness and tranquillity : I say, this natural easiness and good humour is generally an indication of a good heart, of an humane and moderate disposition.

There are some too, that make it a point of glory to be happy, in spite of poverty, and an indigence of the outward means of happiness ; and it must be owned, that this is, indeed, matter of very real glory : but it is a glory so little envied, and so little esteemed, that a person may arrogate as much of it as he pleases to himself, and value himself upon such a philosophical happiness, without giving the least offence. The first and greatest glory is placed in being happy, because one is rich ; but to be happy, tho' one is poor, and deprived of the conveniences of life, is but a secondary kind of glory,

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very inferior to the other. A poor man says he is happy, and we hear him with pleasure, without the least emotions of spite and envy. But a rich man says the same thing, and he choques us. Why is this? Do we envy him his riches, rather than his happiness? Unaccountable humour! that happiness should not be so much the object of our envy, as the things to which we have affixed it. We would be happy in one particular way, and we would not in any other; and such are the illusions of fancy and sense, that, convinced as we are, that persons in some certain situations are happy, yet we would not take their place, we would not accept of their happiness.

II.

Let a person possessed of an affluence of the good things of life tell a true Christian, that he is not the happier for them; he shall only confirm him, by this testimony, drawn from his own experience, in his contempt of the world. Let him say so to other men of fortune, his equals, and the greatest part of them shall tell him, if they speak from their heart, That they experience the same thing. But let him say so to the rest of the world, to his inferiors, and they shall conclude nothing from it in prejudice of riches and other advantages of fortune. They will only judge, that since he is not happy in the possession of every thing that can procure happiness, he is not made like other men. They will
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elude the force of his example, by supposing some singularity in his character, some whimsical perverseness, or excessive delicacy. If he is not happy, they will say, it is his own fault. If we were in his place, we should hardly complain.

In short, the man who enjoys those advantages in which the common opinion makes happiness to consist, runs no risque in saying, that he is not happy. For the most part, he is not believed. It is only a way of talking, it is said ; a habit of complaining without reason. But tho' he should be believed, yet his ample fortune, great extraction, and posts of honour, are abundantly sufficient to secure him in the public opinion.

On the contrary, the poor man, who says he is unhappy, sinks himself still lower by his complaints, and confirms those who hear him in a contempt of his condition. If he says, that he is happy, this raises him a little in the eyes of a few people ; but there are others that despise him just so much the more. It is stupidity, say they, alone, that he is indebted to for his happiness. He neither feels nor thinks.

III.

If I was to find out the most happy, and the most miserable man in the world, I would look for them in a cloister.

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IV.

Thousands of them, who have been engaged in the pursuit of wealth and greatness, from a persuasion, that they should find solid happiness in them, have been convinced of their mistake by experience ; but very few have been thoroughly cured of it. The heart is not so soon changed as the understanding. Even grace itself does not always take away a certain degree of attachment, which, however involuntary, is yet very real, and the subject of encounters and conquests as long as we live.

I have read formerly a book called, *The courtesan undeceived* ; a very modest title ! and if it is really, as I have been told, the work of a courtesan who describes herself, the title of *The courtesan reformed* might not have been so proper.

V.

Ambition itself is not so universal a passion as the love of riches. Ambition is but a particular passion, and with which the other passions may happen to interfere. The desire of riches is the effect of all the other passions ; for riches are the instrument of them all. Besides, a view of the inconveniencies of grandeur may extinguish or weaken ambition. There are rich men who have no desire to become great : nay, perhaps, there are poor men of good sense, who are so fond of their liberty and ease,
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that they would not exchange them for the highest honours and preferments, even to gain the wealth that is usually annexed to them ; but there is no sort of men (I except true Christians) who would refuse riches, if they were offered by themselves, and who do not think they should be happier with a larger fortune than they have. The greatest part of Christians (I mean of good ones) are under a mistake in this point, as well as the rest of the world. They are convinced of the inconvenience of riches with respect to their future happiness, but not with respect to their present: they would be better Christians, or, however, with less cost, if they had more philosophy. A recluse imagines he has quitted a great deal in quitting the world, and this thought sometimes causes in him a regret, or fills him with a vanity, which a good philosophy would easily repress.

But, indeed, a false notion of the advantages of riches, in some sort, enhances the value of the sacrifice that is made of them. The less the understanding is enlightened, the greater resolution appears in the heart ; and the weaker our reason is in this case, the stronger it shews our faith to be.

VI.

You believe you should be happier, if you had a better fortune, because you would have it in your power to command a more

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frequent enjoyment of certain pleasures you are fond of, or even to procure new ones, of which you have yet only an idea, and which the narrowness of your fortune forbids you to taste. You have thought a thousand times how you should employ those treasures which the miser buries, if a kind providence should put them into your hands. You have amused yourself with a thousand projects. You have set yourself in the place of the rich, and found yourself happy in it. Your very dreams have helped to convince you. The morning * that dissipates them, still leaves some traces of them behind ; and you are satisfied, that if shadows and phantoms are so agreeable, the reality must be so. All fancy entirely ! Your imagination imposes upon you. It magnifies things excessively, and makes very false representations of them. Those pleasures of the great, which you think so exquisite, are less than the common ones that are enjoyed by their inferiors. You would be quickly surfeited with those that you are most charmed with at present, and it is only owing to your meeting with them so seldom, that they make so lively an impression upon you. It is possible, that a sordid avarice, the common effect of wealth upon a person who has not always enjoy'd it, might deprive you,

* *Dormierant somnum suum, & nihil invenerunt omnes viri divitiarum in manibus suis. Psalm. lxxv.*

not only of the pleasures you promised yourself, but even of the necessaries of life. The same person is often a miser upon a large fortune, who was extravagant upon a small one. However, it is not denied but that you would at first be considerably happier than you were, and that the first entrance upon your change might answer your expectations. Novelty has unquestionably great charms in it ; but you would soon grow familiar with your new fortune: your transports would abate insensibly : every day would do something toward diminishing your happiness ; and, in short, after a time, you would find yourself precisely at the very same point you set out from : the same indifference for what you have, and the same hankering after what you have not, you would find come upon you with all their consequences. In a word, you are not contented now ; you would not be more so then, and, perhaps, you would be less.

VII.

Men are at the same time insatiable and moderate in their desires. They desire, properly speaking, at least, to any degree that disquiets them, no more than what is near them, and lies within their reach. Thus, when they say, Give me such or such a thing, and I shall be content, they are under a mistake, but they tell no lye. They have, indeed, reason to believe, that if they
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could obtain their wish, they should be actually content with regard to the desire that at present solicits them ; that is to say, that they should be delivered from the pain which that desire necessarily causes them, while it is not in possession of its object. But will this desire, when it is gratified, become immediately a matter of satisfaction, and a satisfaction that will be lasting ? Shall they have a lively sense of the pleasure of possessing what they so ardently wished for, and shall that sense always hold ? They imagine this will be the case, and this is the foundation of all their errors.

It is true, the getting rid of a desire that tyrannized over the heart, is always a deliverance from an evil, if it may not properly be called a good. I possess with indifference, may a person say, and I desired with uneasiness ; therefore I am better off than I was. But, then, one desire gratified begets a thousand others. The greater and more elevated our station, the farther we see ; and the farther we see, the more we long for. At first, it was some single thing that our desire was fixed upon ; some one point only, that was wanting to our happiness ; but when that is gained, and we ought, according to our first ideas, to find our happiness complete, we want but every thing. Thus the heart passes from object to object, from desire to desire, and is delivered over at the same time to satiety and disquietude.

VIII. There

VIII.

There is not a man who enjoys twenty thousand a year, that would refuse to accept of twenty more, upon condition of having it taken from him, if he was not the happier for it ; and yet he would make but a sorry bargain in taking it upon these terms. Probably, this addition to his estate would make no essential addition to his happiness ; it might give him some short and transient satisfaction, after which he would come back to his former condition ; nay, perhaps, sink lower, and find himself less happy, than he was before. But if he should then be deprived of this accessional fortune, for not coming up to the terms upon which he had received it, he would certainly be made very unhappy : his situation would be considerably lower, than that he was in before his advancement.

I know nothing more rarely to be found, than a person reconciled to the loss of his fortune, and a man made happier by the enlargement of it : yet, there is nobody who would not willingly be richer than he is, tho' it were only for a little while,

IX.

Plutarch, in his discourse upon the desire of riches, hits off this matter very well. *Hippomachus, master of the exercises, bearing some persons commend a man of large stature, and who had very long arms, as being well made*

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made for boxing ; Yes, says he, if there was nothing else to be done in this exercise, but just to take the crown down, where it hangs up. The same may be said to those who look with admiration (and as if the sum of our happiness consisted in them) upon large estates, grand houses, heaps of money, and the like. Yes, you would be right, if the business was to purchase happiness, and it was a thing that was set to sale.

X.

Lord, give me neither poverty nor riches *. What good sense and philosophy is there in this wise man's prayer ? Extreme poverty, and exorbitant wealth, are equally contrary to true happiness ; and we may fairly apply to this subject the common maxim, That extremes meet.

But of these two evils, poverty and riches, which is the greatest ? To speak sincerely, it is poverty, at least for those who have not always been poor. It is seldom that the desire of superfluities is so sensibly felt as the want of necessities ; yet it is a thing that sometimes happens. A poor man, that is grown rich, shall sometimes be more unhappy in his present condition, for want of somewhat superfluous to his happiness, than he was before, when he wanted the necessa-

* *Agur's Prayer. Prov. xxx. 8.*

ries of life. Imaginary necessities are frequently more importunate than real ones.

XI.

A rich man, that had a tolerable share of philosophy, might, perhaps, be somewhat happier than another.

In order to be happy, a person ought, with a competent measure of fortune, to have no passions, and to be all taste : and, in that case, a fortune could not be too large.

He who has a taste for every thing, has a passion for nothing. Such a person has pleasures spring up under his feet ; pleasures less lively than those of the passions, but more serene, more pure, more frequent, and more durable.

XII.

Happiness consists in a due proportion of our wants and desires, to the means of satisfying them ; or, rather, in this, that our wants and desires are not too large for the means ; for the inconvenience does not lie in being able to do more than we wish, but in not being able to do so much. Every thing that destroys this balance, and confounds this proportion, so that the desires grow too large for the power of gratifying them, necessarily diminishes our happiness. But an increase of fortune has this effect, because our wants and desires increase with it but in a much higher degree.

XIII. The

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XIII.

The inconveniences of riches are sufficiently known ; but they do not make much impression upon us. They do not enter into our hearts. These, more indocile than our understandings, maintain a set of secret sentiments in contradiction to religion, philosophy, and experience. Hence, two sorts of discourse, and one sort of conduct, with respect to riches. Sometimes it is the heart, sometimes the understanding, that speaks ; but it is always the heart that acts.

It is agreed, that our wants and desires increase in proportion to our fortunes, or, rather, a good deal beyond them ; yet, upon an accession of wealth, this inconvenience is presently looked upon as a mere chimaera, which it would be ridiculous to be afraid of. It is generally agreed, and even passed into a proverb, that great fortunes are attended with great vexations. But it is easy, says a person in a lower condition, for such people to get rid of their cares. Riches are only an embarrassment to the miser, who is bent upon raking up every thing, and losing nothing. Those who have but little in the world, are obliged to this exact œconomy, and it is one of the greatest inconveniencies of narrow circumstances. But if I was master of a large fortune, I should know how to sacrifice a part of it to my ease. For instance, If I was offered an estate of ten thousand a year, of such a nature as
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to require a good deal of care and management, I would freely part with one half of it, that I might enjoy the other without interruption.

Mere talk all this ! Find a man who would make such a bargain. When a person came to the trial, he would not think as he does now, when he is reasoning only upon the mere supposition, and that without reflecting too closely upon it. It is possible, however, that there might be some, who, in the transports of their first joy, would sign an agreement of this kind ; but it is certain, that the greatest part of mankind would not be long before they repented it : they would reproach themselves a thousand times with their weakness, or their indolence : they would taste no pleasure in the enjoyment of that part to which they had at first confined their desires, when they came to reflect, that it was owing to themselves, that they were not masters of the other. It is not that such a bargain as this would not be highly reasonable, and much to their advantage. But the grievance is, that they made it when it was in their power to have let it alone. For, see again one of the most common sources of our unhappiness ! Different methods of conduct present themselves. We examine these, discover which is best, make choice of it, and then repent. The reasons which have determined us grow faint and disappear, giving

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ing place to opposite reasons, which sway the mind in their turn, and make us uneasy and dissatisfied with our former resolutions. One would imagine, that our choice made a change in the nature of objects. Experience still farther completes the deception. The course we have taken has its inconveniences, and we feel them. This while, we are insensible of its advantages, nor do we see any thing of the inconveniences of that which we might have taken. Thus is our prudence made the sport of our imagination; for it is that, and not our reason, which is the cause of most of the regret which we feel upon such occasions. As impatient as men are, they do not deserve all the reproaches of this kind, which they are apt to throw upon themselves. That vanity which is so careful of their satisfaction upon other occasions, ought to take some care, methinks, of consoling them upon this. It is true, it tells them sometimes, that they have been more unfortunate than indiscreet. But ought it not rather to tell them, that their choice has been as good as it was wise, and that they would have had much more reason to complain, than they have at present, if they had made any other? This is a consideration which would be so much the more solid, as reason would frequently concur to support it.

XIV.

A *Manichæan*, upon his system of two principles, might easily explain, why men become rich without being ever the happier for it. The good principle, would he say, increases our fortune, in order to increase our happiness ; but, at the same time, the evil principle increases our desires in the same proportion, or, rather, out of all proportion whatever. The good principle doubles our riches, and the ill one multiplies our cares ; so that the favours and benevolence of the one become useless, and even prejudicial, thro' the malice of the other,

We see by this, that two men, who become more unhappy, or less happy, than they were, the one by an increase of his fortune, the other by a diminution of his, become so precisely for the same reason ; that is to say, by means of desires which they are not in a condition of gratifying. There is no longer the same proportion between their wants and their fortune, which there was before. Happiness is greater or less, as that proportion is more or less exact. But a proportion strictly exact is scarce ever to be met with ; on the contrary, a disproportion, and a very great one, between the desires and the power of satisfying them, is one of the commonest things in the world ; and hence it is, that such numbers are unhappy.

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XV.

There is nothing absolutely impossible in the supposition, that there might be a person found, who, tho' possessed only of a moderate fortune, yet desires no more, because he has sufficient to satisfy all such of his wants and desires, as are capable of being satisfied by the means of riches. But, besides these desires and wants, there are a number of others, in respect of which, the most immense fortune would be useless. Wealth is not a means of universal efficacy. The most essential goods of life are not in its power.

XVI.

Poverty is the want of necessities : there are, therefore, two sorts of poverty, as there are two sorts of necessities ; the necessities of life, and the necessities of our condition in it ; the necessities of a man, and the necessities of a man of rank and quality : so that there are scarce any but poor people in the world ; for after those to whom custom has affixed the name, commences another order of poor, which takes in the greatest part of mankind ; these are such as want the necessities proper to their station, an indigence sometimes as vexatious as that of the most indispensable necessities of life. I am not speaking of such necessities as are created merely by our passions, and especially the passions of the great ; I speak only of such necessities as belong to our rank in
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the world, and are approved by reason, as being founded upon common use and custom, which, however unreasonable they may be in themselves, yet it is a dictate of reason, that we conform to them. But the want of this kind of necessaries makes men poor in all conditions of life, from the lowest to the highest, and, indeed, principally in the latter; from whence we have that paradox, That the men of fortune are commonly the poorest men, or, to speak most properly, the most indigent. This last expression is more exact; and a poet might very well say, *That indigence delights to dwell with wealth.* The great, at least, those of them that are so rather by birth and titles, than offices and employments, are, for the most part, of this indigent sort of rich men. Their grandeur impoverishes them. They would enrich themselves by renouncing it, if it was practicable, and placing themselves in a rank more or less inferior, in proportion to their fortune. That which they now give to the demands of greatness, and even of vanity itself, they might then bestow upon other passions, which would make them a much better return. Vanity is a passion equally ruinous and ungrateful. Those insolent expences, which raise the admiration and envy of spectators, commonly yield but inconsiderable pleasures to the persons who defray them; and deprive them of others, in which they would have had much more enjoyment.

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joyment. You shall have a man of ten thousand a year, that has not a shilling to throw away upon a whim. The real or imaginary wants of his station devour every thing, and yet are never satisfied.

But, besides all this, very often, the necessities of life are sacrificed to the real or pretended necessities of one's station, as the table to the equipage; and men live poor, that they may appear rich. There are even some, that endeavour to conceal the narrowness of their fortune under the appearance of avarice, a vice, indeed, that is scandalous enough of itself, yet not so scandalous as poverty; and, after all, the disgrace of passing for a miser, is always sufficiently compensated by the reputation of being rich.

Happy, said a great person, the man in private, the man in low life, who regulates his expences by his own appetites and inclinations, and not by the opinion of other people! I envy him that obscurity, that humble fortune, he has sometimes the weakness to blush at: I could wish to be in his place: I am almost tempted to reduce myself to it: I am sensible I should be a gainer by it: I should enjoy liberty, peace, and plenty in it. But tho' I have philosophy enough to be fully convinced of all this, I have not enough to act upon my conviction: I have not resolution enough to be happy.

It is commonly said, That we see the pleasures of the rich and great, but that we do not see their pains. This saying, tho' true, expresses but half our deception. Take it all together. We place the happiness of these people where it is not : we take their pains for their pleasures : all that outward pomp and ostentation which we are so apt to admire, is their true and real misery. If they are happy, it is by virtue of somewhat we do not see, and which makes them amends for what we do. They owe their happiness to what they enjoy in common with us, and not to that which distinguishes them from us.

XVII.

We grow out of conceit with some things, as a good table, public diversions, and the like, because they no longer give us pleasure, tho' we still love the sort of pleasure we once found in them. These things were once an occasion of pleasure to us, and we liked them ; but they cease to give us pleasure any longer, and we like them no more : yet we are as fond as ever of the pleasure they once procured us. We regret the loss of it, and find a void in the heart for want of it. So that to have no more inclination for these things, is not, properly speaking, to have lost a desire, but to have lost a pleasure. To really lose a desire, it is necessary, that, having some time desired a certain degree of pleasure, we come at length to re-

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strain and stint ourselves in the use of it, and to desire only some degree of it less than we did at first. Our heart must in such a case, in some measure, contract itself, that, its capacity of being happy being brought into a less compass, a smaller quantity of pleasure may satisfy it ; in a word, we must be equally content in possessing less. But this is a thing too, I believe, very possible, and that the capacity of being happy, as it may be enlarged, so it may be diminished, and, in fact, often is so.

We sometimes lose a taste and a pleasure, without perceiving it, and without any diminution of our happiness ; because that taste, and that pleasure, are presently succeeded by others. It matters not of what nature the pleasure be, provided the degree of it be always the same ; and that we lose on one side, provided we gain proportionably on the other, and so the sum total be kept undiminished.

XVIII.

Two men may be each of them content, and yet unequally happy. It is what we experience every day, with respect to particular points of happiness. Let an object appear perfect to us in its kind ; let it procure us the greatest pleasure of a certain sort which we have ever tasted, and of which we have any idea : in regard to this object, we are perfectly content ; and from the time that we imagine nothing better, we desire
nothing

nothing more. But if a new object present itself, of the same kind with the first, in which we discover new degrees of perfection, and new degrees of pleasure; what happens then? We were content before, but we are now no more so. The first pleasure, while we enjoy'd it, was the bound of our desires, as well as the second; but this is greater than the other, and from the time we come to taste it, we are happier than we were before. Hence we may draw this paradox: The condition of a man that is content, may yet be changed for the better, and his happiness may be increased without end.

XIX.

Our memory serves us but indifferently, with respect to past sufferings and enjoyments. It represents these as much greater, and those as much less, than they were. We forget what it was precisely that we felt. Hence it is, that we so bitterly regret the pleasures we have lost, that we so eagerly desire to possess them again, and that we have so little dread of exposing ourselves a second time to the sufferings we have undergone. What pleasure I had then! cries a person, when he looks back to some agreeable passage of his life. Not so much, one might assure him, as he imagines.

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XX.

It is commonly said, That we enjoy pleasure with the more relish, as we have desired it with the greater ardour ; and this maxim holds good, when the pleasure we come to enjoy , after such earnest desires, proves to be precisely such as we had figured to ourselves ; but this is what scarce ever happens. The desire is proportioned to the idea we had of the pleasure, and the enjoyment commonly shews how false that idea was. Thus the desire which precedes the pleasure, almost always diminishes rather than increases it.

It is with the experience of our sufferings, as it is with that of our enjoyments : both the one and the other shew us equally the ridiculous excess both of our fears and our desires, and make us ask alike in both cases, Is this all ?

There are some persons upon whom fear makes such terrible impressions, that when we cannot cure them of their apprehensions, we are obliged, in charity, to wish them the thing they fear.

The distance of what is future, either magnifies or diminishes it in our eyes a great deal beyond what is real : but when at length it is become present, and we have passed some time with it, (for the first impression too is always fallacious) we find, that it a good deal resembles the past.

The same sort of equality, or almost-equality,

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lity, which there is, with respect to happiness, between the several stations and conditions of men in general, is also to be found between the different periods of life in the same person.

XXI.

Spleen and languor, care and sorrow, pain and sickness, these are the three great sources of human misery. But where is it that they are most commonly found? Among the poor and mean, or among the rich and great?

XXII.

We grow weary in time of any kind of pleasure, if it be continued too long. Must this be imputed only to a lassitude of the organs of the body? May not we say, that the soul itself is tired and satiated, and that it would not receive the same impressions of pleasure, too often repeated, even though the organs which are employ'd in transmitting it were not at all impaired?

Novelty is the seasoning of pleasure. It is not only owing to the quickness of their senses, and the strength of their faculties, that young people have such a relish for pleasures; but it is also because those pleasures are new to them.

A person said once, It is not I who am tired of pleasure, but pleasure that is tired of me.

I am told a piece of ill news, which shocks me. At first, I have but a confused apprehension of what consequence the affair will

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will be to me, and what unhappy effects it will be attended with. In a day or two, perhaps, I see the whole more distinctly : my misfortune appears certain and irreparable : I know it better, and am less affected with it : I have a more sorrowful sense of it, but not so lively a one.

XXIII.

We must decline pleasures, for fear of habituating ourselves to them.

Pleasure begets a necessity of pleasure, and of still greater pleasure.

One of the greatest pains that follow pleasure, is, a passion for pleasure.

If the more lively kind of pleasures had no other ill consequences attending them, than that languor and spleen which seizes upon the mind in their absence ; this would be a sufficient argument for avoiding them.

We are never more spleened than after pleasures ; and the spleen which sets us upon seeking them, is almost always more supportable than that which follows them.

XXIV.

A fool tires us less than a man of sense, because a less matter serves to entertain him.

In proportion as we advance in age, we have more need of employment to keep off the spleen. The judgment then growing more solid, and the passions abating, the
taste

taste of pleasure and amusement is less vigorous. Thus, children must have their playthings, youth their pleasures, and men either study or business.

Employment is a better remedy against the spleen than pleasure.

Pleasure is not always necessary, after application to business : there needs, frequently, no more than rest, or, at least, pleasures of the simplest kind. The more lively sort of pleasures are not agreeable, when we want only relaxation : the agitation they give us is a fresh fatigue.

It is necessary, that the pleasures which are taken after labours of the mind, should be vigorous enough to release it from the thoughts it has been engaged with. They ought, in the proper sense of the word, to be *diversions* for it. Plays, that are innocent, are the properest relaxations for men of letters.

XXV.

One of the greatest advantages of a sincere piety in this life is, that it is the best preservative against the spleen.

There are a good many little pleasures in devotion, which are not to be found in real virtue * : but these again too much resemble

* The reader will easily perceive, by what follows, that the author has no design here to insinuate, that devotion in general is not a part of virtue, and necessary to promote and preserve it. He is speaking only of such a false, or, at least, ineffectual kind of it, as has no influence upon the manners. The author always speaks of religion with the utmost regard.

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the pleasures of the world, to be able to afford a solid happiness.

A person once told a woman of pleasure, who was grown devout, that she would now certainly become virtuous. Why, surely, said she, you would not *rob* me of every thing ?

The conversion of a young person is commonly more sincere and real, than that of a woman that is already in her decline. The young person quits the world for virtue. It is grace that has prevailed with her. The old one leaves it only for devotion. Hers is a change of mere decency. The one, in forsaking the world, renounces herself : the other grows more attached to herself than before. In that, the love of God triumphs over her self-love : in this, self-love only changes its form, but still continues the principle of her actions.

XXVI.

The too frequent use of the same pleasures, if I may use the expression, blunts the edge of them. Abstinence gives them a seasoning, and quickens the relish of them. When we give ourselves up to them without reserve, we are frequently punished for the excess, by the satiety that follows it. We no longer taste them with that quick relish that we were wont to do at first, and, in a little time, we are quite set against them.

XXVII. It

XXVII.

It has been said, with good reason, that we ought to calculate in the affair of our pleasures, and that wisdom should always have her counters before her. What is the amount of these pleasures, should we say, and what of the pains with which we must purchase them, or which will follow after them? These considerations might not only prevent us acting in consequence of our desires, which would of itself be a considerable advantage; but also repress, or, at least, moderate, the desires themselves. If the heart has so much power over the understanding, as a melancholy experience but too fully convinces us it has; it is certain also, that the understanding must have some over the heart; and, indeed, we are apt to presume too much of ourselves, by imagining this power to be greater than it is. However, it consists, in a good measure, in the idea which we have of it, and a just confidence increases our strength. It is true, the christian humility disposes us to a distrust of our weakness, and to arm ourselves with all prudent measures against it; but there is also an humility, libertine in its principle, or, at least, of the most direct tendency to libertinism, which aggravates this weakness, and changes it into an absolute inability. Persons of this opinion depress reason, that they may dispense with themselves for not following it; and reduce themselves to the
con-

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condition of brutes, for the privilege of living like them, without shame, and without remorse.

XXVIII.

Decline every pleasure, that may be followed with repentance, and enjoy none to satiety. These are the two rules which wisdom dictates for the choice, and the enjoyment, of our pleasures.

The two great means to lessen the evils of life are, first, to foresee them before they arrive, but with a foresight free from anxiety, and such as will not make us suffer at present for misfortunes which may never befall us; and, secondly, to see them just as they are when they actually happen to us, not to magnify them by a false way of thinking, and add imaginary evils to real ones.

These reflections comprise all that can be said upon the subject of happiness. There are pleasures and pains, goods and evils, annexed to the condition of human life. But the art of being happy, as far as it is in our power, consists, on the one hand, in making the best advantage of what is good, and, on the other, in suffering as little as possible from the evil.



O F

READING and MEMORY.



THE benefit of reading does not consist merely in retaining what we have read, nor must it be imagined, that it is of service to us only in proportion to our memory. Reading, I mean, even of the most indifferent books, is an occasion of thinking. It exercises the understanding; and this is the principal advantage of it; for it is in thinking, chiefly, that our faculties are enlarged and strengthened. It is true, a person will forget his own thoughts, those which were occasioned by reading, as well as those of the books themselves; but then he always improves himself in a habit of thinking, which is a thing much more to be valued, than the remembering other peoples thoughts.

Again, a taste is formed by reading good books; and be a person's memory ever so weak, the general notion of what is just and beautiful, imprints itself insensibly upon the mind, in proportion to the goodness of the things

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things we read. This general idea and taste of good writing is sufficient, together with a genius for composing such works as are properly called works of wit. It is by no means necessary for this purpose, that a person should remember the detail of what he has read; and, indeed, a memory that is so faithful as to preserve, not only all that has been entrusted to it, but also that which has been just shewn to it, is rather an hindrance, than an help to composition, as it obstructs the production of new things.

Let us suppose two persons of an equal genius, were each of them to compose a speech, upon their admission into the *French* academy: let one of them have remembered all the fine things in the speeches that have been made before, and I imagine he would find himself more embarrassed in composing his own, than the other, who had not read one of them; or, at least, had retained nothing of what he had read. I am sensible, that the person who had not read, or had forgotten it again, must of course make use of several thoughts that have been employ'd by other people; but as it would be his invention that furnished them, and not his memory, he would generally give them the air of an original.

There is nothing so perplexing, as for a person, when he is labouring upon a subject, to find himself encumbered with other mens thoughts, which he must, at any rate,
get

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get rid of. They are so many distractions to him. The operations of the memory hinder those of the invention. He recollects, but can produce nothing of his own. Upon such occasions, a person, if I may say so, thirsts after ignorance, and could almost wish he had never seen or heard.

A writer, perhaps, would be more copious, and abound in a greater variety of thoughts, the more he has read. But, perhaps, also, he would not be more original. He would have more taste, and less genius, in his writings; fewer of those faults, which give a handle to censures equally just and obvious; and, at the same time, fewer of those beauties, which are so thoroughly relished by the good judges, and do an author so much real honour.

It is true, notwithstanding, that a thought which we recollect from our reading, may sometimes be a means of our producing another very different, and intirely new. Tho' such thoughts have no relation with one another, yet the first has nevertheless served us for an occasion of the latter, which we should never have hit upon, if the first had not occurred to us.

Books may be considered as a sort of seed to the mind. But, whereas the produce of the best soils is always of the same nature with that which has been sown in them; the thoughts of others, taken in by a good genius, frequently shoot out into something

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very different, and the vilest sorts of grain are by this means often changed into a fine wheat.

Reading turns the mind to objects which it would never have fallen upon of itself.

It must also be allowed, that a person who has judgment as well as memory, may, by the help of both, range a set of thoughts in such a manner, as shall make them pass for new, even with persons of the greatest reading. A new assemblage of thoughts does, in some sort, make new ones of them ; and there is great reason it should be deemed so, when an author, with old thoughts alone, produces all the effects of novelty by the happy turn which he gives them. But, in truth, in order to this, there is somewhat more required than mere judgment and memory. There is a kind of invention and genius in an author's thus disguising his thefts so successfully, as to conceal them from his readers. To cheat them out of their good opinion in this manner, is to deserve it.

II.

M. de la Motte says, in one of his odes,

*New subjects chuse,
The only proof of genius.*

Take away *only*, it is true. Persons without genius, being able to furnish nothing themselves, are confined to subjects that
have

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have been already handled. They say the same things that have been said by others ; whereas it requires invention, and consequently genius, to make the first attempt upon a subject. But there is something yet of more difficulty, and more honour for a genius, than even writing well upon a new subject ; and that is, the treating common subjects in a new manner.

It sometimes happens, that when two persons of very unequal genius treat upon a common subject, the author of but moderate abilities shall succeed better than his superior ; that is to say, his piece shall be better in itself. The person of inferior parts lays together the best of what his memory furnishes him with upon the occasion ; while the great author, neglecting all this, is obliged to repeat nothing, to have recourse to thoughts neither so just nor so beautiful as those of other writers, that have labour'd upon the same point before him. He could easily have found several of these thoughts himself ; but he is forbidden, under the penalty of passing for a plagiarist, to find that which has been found before. The world is always very jealous of such inventors at second-hand. It is a misfortune on these occasions to have come too late.

III.

In the case of an equality of merit between works of the same kind, and upon
O 2 the

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the same subject, composed in different periods of time by different writers, the authors of the last are intitled to a higher degree of esteem than those of the first, supposing their performances to be equally new and original.

The reader will easily observe, that I do not intend to carry this assertion farther than to works of mere genius, and not to treatises of learning, philosophy, &c. And, with respect to these, I mean it of those that are upon the same subject, and not of those that are only of the same kind. For instance, the tragedies of *Berenice*, by *Corneille* and *Racine*, are works of the same kind, upon the same subject; whereas the *Cinna* and *Mitbridates* are only works of the same kind. My meaning, therefore, is not that the person who should now produce a tragedy as fine as *Mitbridates*, would, upon that, take place of *Racine*. On the contrary, I allow, that the excellent models of first writers give great assistance to their successors, and considerably shorten the way to perfection in that kind of writing; and that an author may outdo his predecessors, without being their superior in point of genius. But what I am saying is, that I should prefer to *Racine* the person who, without borrowing any thing from the tragedy of *Mitbridates*, should produce as good a one upon the same subject. Perhaps, even this is not saying
enough;

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enough ; and perhaps, too, I am talking of an impossibility.

IV.

But, whatever may be determined upon the point, it must be allowed, that though memory is rather an hindrance than an help to the composition of works of mere entertainment, yet it is in itself a great advantage. *It is, as Montaigne says, an implement of wonderful service, and without which the judgment performs its part with great difficulty.* There can be no knowledge without memory, and yet knowledge is a thing of great entertainment. Not to mention those parts of it which properly denominate a man a scholar, must it not be matter of vast pleasure to have the memory only furnished with the finest thoughts of the men of genius in all ages ? Though knowledge is not of so much use to us in writing as invention is, yet we are forced to be beholden to it in conversation, which, indeed, may properly be called, The theatre of the memory. Besides, though a large stock of knowledge, even joined with a faculty of expressing it handsomely, be not sufficient to make an author of the first rank, yet it is enough to qualify a man for being a good one, and to furnish him for the composition of works, if not of the highest value, yet of considerable usefulness. The books, which consist only of common things well expressed, and disposed into an easy and agreeable method,

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are the books that are most generally inquired after. I might give instances enough of this ; and the reason is, that upon most subjects the generality of readers have neither a capacity to apprehend, nor any occasion to know, more than the commonest subjects will teach them.

However it be, a moderate share of parts, with a good memory, are sufficient to qualify a person for shining in conversation ; and a talent of this kind is frequently of more advantage, than the most uncommon parts. We esteem a great genius ; but we are fond of, and delight in the company of, a person who is capable of informing us of a variety of things, and is equally useful and entertaining.

If the writings of a man of mere reading and memory are not always of the greatest value, his personal value is the greater. But a merit of this kind is commonly of more service to a man, than that of his works.

I shall only observe farther, that it is infinitely better to have no memory, than to have it without sense.

A fool of learning is a fool indeed;

as M. Boileau says : but very often, a block-head with a good memory is somewhat worse than a mere fool ; and is not only silly in his conversation, but ostentatious and impertinent ;

And

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*And is a coxcomb grown, by dint of reading,
Whom gentle nature only meant a dunce *.*

In general, and, if you will, in speculation, we set a greater value upon genius, than upon memory and knowledge ; but in practical life, and upon particular occasions, we admire knowledge and memory more than genius. We prefer parts to knowledge, when we consider these advantages in themselves, and independently of the persons they belong to ; but we almost always prefer a man of knowledge to one of mere parts, unless the former be quite a dunce, which is a thing, indeed, not without example.

V.

When we read only for amusement, it were to be wished, that we had no memory, that we might be able to read the same books over and over again, with the same pleasure. One would wish too, if it were possible, to forget intirely, that we had read them at all. The bare apprehension, that we have read a book, diminishes something of the pleasure we should take in a second reading, even tho' we remembered absolutely nothing at all of it.

I should prefer the pleasure of being able to read the same thing several times over,

* *Essay upon criticism, by the M. abbot du Resnel.*

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to the honour of remembring all I read ; as I take more delight in learning, than in knowing.

All that I ever read, said a person, is as present to me as if I had just been reading it. All that I read over again, says another, is as new to me as if I never read it. You are a very extraordinary person, I say to the first ; but it is the second I call the happy one *.

** Memoriam fuisse in Themistocle singularem ferunt, qui quidam etiam pollicenti cuidam se artem et methorem tractantem, respondisse dicitur obliuisci se malle discere. Cicero, Academ. Quæst. Lib. 2.*





O F

N O B I L I T Y.



Obility is the reward of virtue, and the spur to it. Nothing, therefore, can be more just and useful, than its institution. It is the prince's duty to reward virtue, and it is his duty to reward it in a way suitable to its own taste, that is to say, by titles and distinctions of honour ; for, next to the reward which it receives of itself in the inward pleasure and satisfaction that attend it, and next to that credit and reputation, the desire of which is the principal motive to a virtue purely human, nothing is more agreeable to it, than those marks of honour that are established among all nations, to justify and confirm, in some measure, the public esteem.

To encourage virtue, is a justice the prince owes to individuals that are virtuous ; and it is no less a duty he owes to his subjects in general, among whom such encouragements tend to promote and advance the practice of
it ;

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it ; and a prince is bound to endeavour the promotion of virtue among his subjects, both for the sake of those upon whom his endeavours may be effectual, and for the benefit of their conduct to other people ; not to observe the undoubted advantage which the virtue of subjects is of to the prince himself.

Thus far all the world is agreed, that it is very reasonable to reward and encourage virtue, by conferring honours upon it ; but it is not equally agreed, whether those honours ought to be hereditary. Nobility, some will allow, cannot have too many privileges granted to it ; but then they contend, that it ought to be personal, and not suffered to pass to the descendants. Such hereditary honour, they allege, serves only to inspire a vain and ridiculous pride. Those who come by it this way, are not likely to be at much pains to acquire an ornament they find themselves possessed of by their birth, but too naturally give themselves up to a life of luxury and indolence.

It must be owned, this is too frequently the case ; but then, the contrary is also often true : and the honours which persons find themselves born to, through the virtue of their progenitors, prove an incitement to them to tread in the same steps, and equal them in merit ; to make themselves worthy of the rank they derive from their birth, and add still new lustre to it by their own per-

personal virtue. And this, now, was undoubtedly the end which princes proposed to themselves, and the advantage they had in view, in making nobility hereditary.

I am not afraid of being charged with flattery to my own country, if, I say, that the establishment of nobility has had particular success in *France*. An elevation of sentiments, a greatness of soul, and a desire of glory, no-where prevail so universally, and in so eminent a degree, as among the *French* nobility.

However, it must be allowed, that this will admit of several exceptions. The design of the prince has, no doubt, been defeated upon a great number of noblemen; and it is certain, that honour and virtue are not always transmitted together.

This is a misfortune that the world has long lamented. The philosophers, the orators, and even the poets themselves, have been tedious upon the subject; but some of them, it should seem, more from spleen and ill-nature, than a concern for the public; and with a design rather to affront than reform.

II.

When we see a nobleman without virtue, we are apt to compare what he is, with what he ought to be, and what his ancestors have been. It is this that disgraces him.

Noble-

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Noblemen are under higher obligations to virtue than other men, because nobility was conferred upon them only to make them virtuous. Their fathers received this honour, because they were so; and it is transmitted to the children, that they might be so. By accepting it, they have bound themselves under fresh obligations to virtue, and contracted a debt to their prince, and their country, which they must either acquit themselves of, or else renounce their extraction.

III.

The prince is desirous to have a certain number of his subjects distinguished from all the rest by their merit, and more forward to the enterprize of great actions, particularly those of war, which call for the exercise of an heroic courage. With this view he invests with distinctions of honour those who have signalized themselves by any illustrious action; and these distinctions he leaves in their families, to the end that they might be the instruments of producing a race of heroes. By perpetuating the honours, he hopes to perpetuate the merit that belongs to them. The father engages, in some sort, for his children; and makes good his engagements, we will suppose, by neglecting nothing that may qualify them for acknowledging, by their services, the honour which their prince has bestowed upon them. What a crime now is it, in such a case, for children

dren to disappoint both their father, and their prince, and to be influenced neither by the example of the one, nor the favours of the other!

IV.

The king has just been conferring the honour of nobility upon me, said a father to his children, and he has done you the same favour; and this honour is to descend to all our posterity, upon a condition, however, without which I should have absolutely refused this reward of my services; which is, that all those who shall derive their nobility from me, beginning with yourselves, shall be degraded from it, if they render themselves unworthy of it by a life either criminal or useless. This law, which is peculiar to my family, shall be, in time to come, an honourable distinction of it. You will all partake of my glory, by preserving your nobility in the same methods by which I have acquired it.

V.

The person who wants virtue in a station that requires a great deal, is despised, and even hated, by those who have least of it. He violates the decencies of his rank, and gives offence to all mankind. It is naturally expected, that persons act, in some degree, up to their character. The world is inexorable upon this point. This seems to proceed from some love of order, which the most abandoned cannot intirely extinguish.

VI. If

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VI.

If the nobleman is under stronger obligations to virtue than the rest of the world, he has greater helps to the acquisition of it. The able tutors, which his high birth procures for him, supply him with the best instructions, and every thing that is comprised in a happy education. The great men, his progenitors, furnish him with examples of the greatest efficacy, that is to say, domestic ones.

VII.

The man that is to be despised is, properly speaking, one who ought to make himself esteemed, and becomes contemptible, merely through his own fault, and vicious inclinations; for, if a man of quality had been brought up like a peasant, it would only move my compassion for him, if I saw him discover a suitable disposition and manner of thinking; and I should turn all my resentment against those who had the care of his youth. Contempt belongs only to him, who is obliged by his birth, and enabled by his education, to make a man of merit.

VIII.

That which completes the infamy of a nobleman without virtue is, the comparison which the world naturally draws between him and his ancestors. He is sure to be compared with his nearest progenitors, his father and his grandfather. The difference
between

between the father and his children is the most striking, and, for that reason, most mortifying. What would not have been expected from a son of *M. de Turenne's*! No ordinary degree of merit could have secured him from contempt.

IX.

Let us see, now, what honour nobility does to merit, when it is joined with it, and how much it adds to the lustre of it. The great, that are virtuous, are so well paid for their virtue, by the glory that they receive from it, that it almost brings the merit of it to nothing. The fear of censure, and desire of applause, that belongs to such elevated stations, are able, one would think, to change, or at least restrain, the most vicious disposition. What then can we think of those, upon whom such powerful motives are without effect? What! but that they are born with an invincible opposition to virtue?

The first advantage of high birth, with regard to reputation, is, that it sets merit in the best light.

All eyes are turned upon the heir of a great family. Good or ill omens are drawn from his most trifling words and actions; people observe the progress of his education: they attend him to the court, or the camp, and follow him from the cradle to the grave,

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grave, with an attention which nothing can escape.

But then, again, the prejudice is always in his favour. Every body is disposed to commend him, and does it with pleasure upon all occasions. The public does not look with the same eye upon two persons of equal merit, that are not equals in birth. Nobility always carries a great sway with it, and gives an infallible title to superior esteem. It throws a lustre upon good actions, which they cannot acquire any other way. It, in some measure, doubles the merit of them.

I allow, that philosophers do not think in this manner. Merit is not the more illustrious in their eyes, for being adorned with nobility. They judge of it as it is in itself, without regarding its appendages; or, however, no farther than as circumstances, which may have rendered the acquisition of it more or less difficult. For this reason, they often assign a larger portion of esteem to good qualities, and good actions, in a person of low birth, than in one of high; unless, taking things in another view, they account it meritorious in the latter, that he has not thought his quality could dispense him for the neglect of virtue. It certainly argues some resolution in such persons to think and act differently from others of their own rank. The opinion which makes all merit
consist

consist in nobility, especially when it is supported by wealth, seems to be that of many of the people of quality, at least if we may judge of them by their conduct. And it is this that has made it a question, whether a great extraction is not rather a hindrance, than a help to virtue.





Reflections upon TASTE;

IN WHICH

*That maxim is examined, which says,
A person ought to write for all
the world.*



HIS maxim was neither *Horace's* nor *Pindar's*. Never aim, says the *Latin poet*, to get the *applauses of the vulgar*. Be content with a few readers.

*Neque te ut miratur turba labores,
Contentus paucis lectoribus.*

Lib. I. Sat. 10.

My quiver, says Pindar, in his second Olympic, is full of shafts, quick and piercing, the sound of which strikes the intelligent, but is lost upon the multitude. They have need of interpreters to understand me.

The late M. the abbot *de Massica*, who has so well translated several odes of this poet, says, in one of the remarks he has given with his translation, *That there is no*
writer,

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writer, who pays a greater compliment to his readers than Pindar. He shews them, that he has an opinion of their penetration; and, by allowing himself never to offer them any but the finest sense, appears to be fully satisfied, that without a mixture of any thing mean, they will be able thoroughly to comprehend him.

However, it is certain, the generality of readers do not thoroughly understand him. It was no more *Pindar's* design, than it was *Horace's*, to write for all the world.

Let *Palæmon*, says *Martial*, write for the mob.

Scribat carmina circulis Palæmon.

For my part, I desire only to please the few I write only for nice ears.

Me raris juvat auribus placere.

Lib II. Ep. 86.

However, so trite and common a maxim as this, cannot be absolutely false. There is always something true in these popular sayings: but this has a good deal more falshood than truth in it, or, at least, is very grossly misapplied, as I propose to shew in the following reflections.

II.

A person must write for all the world, that would please them all; but then he

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must write below what he would do, if he was to write only for persons of taste.

A writer can never please, any farther than he accommodates himself to the persons he has a desire to please, and confines himself within their sphere. A performance that is excellent, is thought a sorry one by a certain class of readers, who would think it excellent, if it was barely good.

In order to adapt himself to all capacities, in a work of instruction, a person must make use only of plain and common thoughts ; or if he has any that are more studied, and of a more delicate and uncommon kind, he must take a compass in expressing them ; which, however necessary for the generality of readers, is quite unnecessary, and for that reason disagreeable, to men of fine understandings.

For a person to aim at pleasing every body, in a work either of instruction or amusement, is the way to be disliked, or, at least, the less liked, by persons of ability. And to confine himself, in a work of entertainment, to such beauties only, as all the world are capable of relishing, is to forbid himself the use of those, which men of capacity are fondest of, and which they look upon as the chief excellence of such kind of performances.

III.

It will be said, perhaps, that there are some beauties, which are to the taste of all the world ; such are those which are more particularly called beauties of sentiment.

I answer, first, that though there are certain beauties which all the world relish ; yet all the world do not relish them alike.

Secondly, There are other beauties of the highest kind, in great variety, which are thoroughly tasted by persons of genius only.

As to sentiments, they are not adapted to all capacities, but when they are plain in themselves, and plainly expressed. If they are ever so little complicated, and delivered with any delicacy of turn and expression, they escape the generality of readers, and sometimes appear false to them. And yet this delicacy is frequently no more than a thorough imitation of nature. It consists in making the passions speak their own natural language ; in saying things in their proper order, which is scarce ever the order of the mind ; in suppressing what delicacy requires to be suppressed. And this sometimes may occasion some obscurity.

Every man has, more or less, a taste of sentiments ; but every man's taste is not alike, either in point of quickness or delicacy. Some persons have very lively sensations in these things, but not very delicate ones,

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We do not always perceive in a book the propriety of a manner of expression, which yet we may see instances enough of in persons under the influence of the passion described. An author is sometimes accused of departing from nature, when at the same time he copies it most faithfully. There are few people that understand nature thoroughly.

Take a passage in *Fontenelle*, that is censured as unnatural and affected, and you will find it the most just and natural expression of the sentiment or passion intended, that can be. Let the critic attempt to change the turn he finds fault with, for a more simple and common one, and he shall not only make the passage more flat and languishing, but also intirely destroy the exactness of the imitation. By lowering the spirit of it, he is sure to make it less lively and passionate. And sometimes a passage, condemned for having too much wit in it, is not witty, properly speaking, but only delicate.

IV.

There are books that meet with a more general reception and success, than others, merely by virtue of their not being to the taste of real judges. And frequently too they hit the general taste, for no other reason, but because their authors were not men of any great genius, and capable of writing above it. Authors, therefore, ought never to

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to estimate their merit by their success; they should rather be sensible, *that the inferior beauties of writing are more to the general taste, than those of a higher kind; and that the general reception their works meet with, is owing to this cause* *.

V.

The writer that thinks much, and makes his readers think, will never be a writer for the generality of people. They cannot reach so high, nor he descend so low, without debasing himself.

Undoubtedly it is a talent, and a talent very valuable for its usefulness, to be able to adapt one's self to all capacities. But to pretend, that a great genius becomes still greater in himself, by coming down to the apprehensions of all sorts of people; to say, that father *Bourdaloue*, when he preached in a country village, and addressed himself to the understandings of the common people, made a greater figure, than when he charmed the court and city; is to talk at random, and utterly confound all our ideas. No doubt but two talents are better than one; and when we discover a new talent in any person, tho' inferior to that we were before acquainted with, it is admitted as a proof of more extensive genius in him, than we had before taken him to have: especially if they

* *M. de la Moette*, in his discourse upon *Ines de Castro*.

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are talents, which, by reason of some natural opposition to each other, are seldom found in the same person. But then it is not the inferior talent that makes us think more highly of a person in this case ; but the two opposite talents being united in him. We admire him in whatever form he appears to us ; not that every form is equally to be admired, but because we are sensible he has it in his power to assume which he pleases.

VI.

When I am saying, there are excellent performances, that yet are not adapted to all capacities, I do not mean it of such as treat upon matters the generality of men are intire strangers to ; and which require in their readers an acquaintance with some particular branches of knowledge. They are only works of taste and entertainment which I have in view ; pieces of instruction upon common subjects, and which require no more than a proper natural capacity to undertake them. And I affirm, that there are several performances of this kind, which are confined to the reading of a few persons, purely on account of their being composed with more depth, delicacy, and precision, and, of consequence, being more valuable, than many others of the same sort. And I add, that so far from counting this as a fault in them, and treating such pieces as obscure and cloudy, it ought to be looked upon as their
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their excellence, which it would be impossible to deprive them of, without absolutely spoiling them.

It is true, there are several passages in such works accessible to common readers, who are apt to flatter themselves much upon understanding them. An author frequently inserts them with design, sometimes too, as I shall presently shew, against his own judgment; and it is to these that he is obliged for a great part of his readers. But, are passages of this sort the most valuable part of his performance, and that which gives good judges so high an opinion of it? It must by no means be said: and therefore it is certain, that the common run of readers know but the smallest part of the excellence of several works, that yet have a very general reception. They have heard them commended by others, and therefore they commend them themselves; nay, and read them too with a certain degree of pleasure; but, at bottom, they are not capable of relishing the grand beauties in them. They may be said to esteem, rather than taste them, if, indeed, that can be called esteem, which is a mere deference to the sentiments of other people, and a commendation without judgment.

And sometimes even this commendation has no meaning with respect to the performance commended, but proceeds intirely from the vanity of those that give it. All
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the voices that applaud, on these occasions, are, by no means, to be counted ; and an author that would guard against pride, might find matter enough of humiliation in the most fortunate success. Some praise a work for no other reason, but because it has little in it that deserves praise, or even for its very faults. Others are mere echos, and repeat what they have heard from men of judgment ; as there are others again, that commend only to do themselves honour, to give themselves an air of sufficiency, and, in short, to commend themselves.

Ask all the people that have read M. *Rochejoucault's* maxims, what is their opinion of that work ; and they will answer you to a man, that they think it admirable. But one half of them that say so shall be liars ; or, if they speak as they mean, it is more owing to their prepossession, than their taste and discernment. They may, perhaps, believe what they say ; but they have no sense and conviction of the truth of it.

The case is the same with a great many other pieces, of a more popular turn than this ; such as were designed purely for amusement, or, at least, are read only with that view ; nay, with such as are absolutely trifling, and therefore have still more appearance of being wrote for all sorts of readers. To give an instance of the first kind, Who is there that has not read the *Princess of Cleves*, and read it more than once ? But can it be
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imagined, that all who have read this piece, have entered into the whole beauty of it? Let us hear M. Fontenelle upon this point.

I desire of the ladies, says he, in his preface to the *Plurality of Worlds*, *no more application for this whole system of philosophy, than is required for reading the princess of Cleves, if a person would take the whole intrigue along with him, and understand the full beauty of it.*

M. Fontenelle speaks only of application; he was afraid to say any thing of capacity, yet he might very justly have done it; but it was more polite in him to let it alone. It would be resented from a writer, who should, in plain terms, require capacity in his readers; but it is allowable enough for him to hint it, under the name of attention.

M. Fontenelle, therefore, meant to tell the ladies, that such of them as had capacity, and a proper share of application, need not be discouraged, by the title of his book, from attempting to read it: and to acquaint them precisely with the degree of understanding and attention he requires from them, he tells them, it is the same which they must have for reading the *Princess of Cleves, if they would take the intrigue along with them, &c.* From whence it follows, that the greatest part of the ladies do not enter into all the beauties of that ingenious romance, though they may flatter themselves they do intirely; because it is
certain,

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certain, that there are but few among them, that thoroughly understand the *Plurality of Worlds*.

But, is a comparison between these two works altogether just? And, can it be said, that a person, who is master of the beauties of the one, is therefore capable of understanding the other? For my own part, I should not chuse to say it. These are two performances of a very different nature. The kind of capacity which qualifies a person for entering into the beauties of a romance, is very different from that which enables him to understand with ease, and perfectly digest, a system of philosophy. Let a system be explained and illustrated ever so ingeniously, yet still there is required, in order to understand it, a certain share of philosophical capacity; and it is this kind of capacity which the ladies have generally the least of. The most clear and simple reasonings are more above their reach, than the most refined and elevated sentiments.

Besides, tho' the *Plurality of Worlds* required no more attention than the *Princess of Cleves*, yet the ladies would much more easily enter into the beauties of the latter, than they would understand the former; because it is much easier for them to give attention to a romance, than to a piece of philosophy, how agreeably soever it may be written. The subject of a romance is a good deal more in their sphere, and at the same

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same time abundantly more interesting. The ideas of it, as M. *Fontenelle* himself observes, are a great deal more familiar to them.

The address he makes use of to engage the ladies to read and think well of his book, is extremely dextrous. He has effectually secured to his interest all those that pique themselves upon their understanding, by the application he makes to their vanity. However, I know some ladies, who have confessed to me, that they did not very perfectly understand the *Plurality of Worlds* ; though, for certain, there was not a beauty, or a fault, in the *Princess of Cleves*, that had escaped them. But what is still more, I know some who have talked to me of that ingenious romance itself in such a manner, as convinced me, that it was above their capacities. Indeed, they have not told me directly, that there were several passages in that piece, which they did not understand ; a confession of this kind would have been too mortifying : but they gave me to understand it plainly enough, by telling me, there were other romances more to their taste, and added some objections to this, whether well or ill founded, to support their opinion. But I saw presently, that they were not those pretended faults in the *Princess of Cleves*, which made them find less pleasure in reading it, than in reading other things of the same kind, still more faulty. The chief fault of that admirable work is, its excellence

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lence itself to the generality of readers. The true reason of the little pleasure they take in reading it is, that it is too elevated, too refined, and too deeply thought for them ; and, for that reason, above their capacity. They would think it better, if it were really worse.

And I am afraid too, that the great wisdom this book is wrote with, has been some prejudice to it. It is the heart, it must be allowed, rather than the understanding, that reads romances. They please us only in proportion as they flatter our passions ; which, by the way, is a good reason why the reading of them should be prohibited. Madam *de Cleves*, with more weakness and less virtue, would doubtless have been a much more interesting character, because she would then have been more like ourselves ; and, perhaps, the glorious victory she obtains over her passion, is still less adapted to the capacity of common hearts, if I may use the expression, than the style of the work is to common understandings.

VII.

It is certainly a mortification to authors of a certain rank, to find so few readers that are worthy of them, and upon whom nothing would be thrown away. The *Plurality of Worlds*, as I said before, is thoroughly understood but by very few people. One may say of that work, what M. *Fontenelle*

nelle himself has said of father *Malebranche's Search after Truth*: *There is an artful mixture in it of several things not so abstract, which, being easily understood, encourage the reader to apply himself to others, and flatter himself, that he is capable of understanding the whole; or it may be, that he does, in a manner, understand it already.* M. Fontenelle, therefore, must be very sensible, that his book is not calculated for all the world, not even for those who profess to read works of wit. And, indeed, it could not: the subject would not admit of it. And he must be as sensible, that his other works, and of consequence this, even in those places that are barely ingenious, without being at all abstract, are not for all sorts of readers. This he has discovered plainly enough, in his *Judgment of Pluto*, where, giving at the same time a criticism upon his *Dialogues of the Dead*, and a defence of it, he so agreeably rallies that gross kind of critics, who call every thing that is wrote with any degree of genius, obscure or refined. For it is easy to see, that several of the concessions he makes against himself in that piece are ironical; and that, taken literally, they would make against his design. Not but that in other passages, he criticises upon himself in good earnest, and without sparing himself in the least. And this performance, so extraordinary for the wit that shines in every part of it, is made still more so, on account of
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of that severe justice with which M. Fontenelle passes judgment upon himself, and leaves nothing by which we can discover the author in it, but his style.

VIII.

There are works which are looked upon to be just so much the worse, and others just so much the better, the more genius they are wrote with.

The same work shall be too deep, too refined, too good for some persons, that is not enough so for others. It is above the first, and below the second sort of readers. I would tell the latter, This piece is not worth your reading; and the former, You are not capable of reading it. Thus it happens daily, that two persons find no pleasure in reading the same book, for reasons directly opposite.

There are an infinite number of people, who have no relish for any thing above the middling, at least in some certain kinds of writing; and it is no extravagance to affirm, that you are almost as sure of being disliked by them for writing very well, as for writing very ill.

The grand beauties of writing are such as are most singular, most new, and most remote from those we are already acquainted with. But it is precisely this kind of beauties that are most generally disliked. There are persons that do not only not relish them, but

but are really disgusted with them. That which is capable of raising admiration, when it pleases, is sure to give strong disgust when it does not.

Let us suppose a nation made up of men so much our superiors in point of genius, that the lowest among them considerably surpassed the highest of us : it is evident, that our best performances must appear to them very indifferent. But I believe also, that theirs, especially their finest of all, would give us but very little pleasure. The utmost our critics could acknowledge in their works, would be considerable genius ; but they would not be able to discover either taste or judgment. These people, they would say, write enigmas. They know not how to unfold their thoughts, and range them in their proper order and connexion. There is no understanding what they say, and, perhaps, they do not understand themselves,

IX.

Persons are not contented with saying, that an author ought to write for all the world, meaning, that the main of a work ought, as far as the subject will permit, to be adapted to all capacities ; tho' even this would not be true : but they carry it still farther ; so far some do, as to pretend there ought to be nothing in a work of entertainment, that is not level to every understanding. They apply the maxim in dispute to

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the finest passages of this work and t'other, and, to revenge themselves, in some measure, for not having immediately understood them, they peremptorily condemn them.

I was reading one day to a friend of mine (a man of capacity to a certain degree) some passages in a new book, that was wrote with a good deal of delicacy. He did not seem to be taken with what I read, so much as I thought he ought to be. I asked him the reason of it, and he told me, that he did not perfectly understand it. I explained the passages to him, and thought he would then certainly have joined with me in admiring them ; but he answered coldly, that persons should write for all the world, and that an author, when he stood in need of a commentator, became a bad one. I reply'd, that an author who wanted a commentary for some persons, might yet be very clear to others. But allow me, said I, to make a supposition : You are acquainted, as well as myself, with *M. de ******. You know he has no very extraordinary capacity ; but yet he is fond of reading the best books. Do you imagine, now, that he understands every thing he reads, or even as much as you yourself understand ? To be sure, you do not. But if he should think fit to condemn every thing he did not understand, upon the authority of this maxim, That an author ought to write for all the world, what would you say to him ? My friend presently took

took the hint, and, being at bottom a person of very good sense, he acknowledged his mistake without any resentment.

Bruyere says, He will allow the good writers are scarce enough ; but then he asks, Where are the people that know how to read ?

X.

If professed critics were obliged to examine authors impartially, and with a view to observe their beauties as well as their faults, and to give reasons for one as well as the other, there would be a great many fewer writers in this way ; not only because their ill-nature would not find its account in this kind of criticism, but also because they are, for the most part, incapable of it. These gentlemen are seldom geniuses of the first rank ; and very frequently they fall upon things that are much above their capacity, and, indeed, for no other reason but because they are.

Some, who have criticised the antients, have been justly reproached with having condemned several things in their authors, which they themselves would have thought, very fine, if they had properly understood them. Most of the critics upon the moderns may as justly be reproached upon the same score. The want of genius in the one has been full as productive of rudeness and insolence, as ignorance in the other.

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XI.

Besides, there is a wide difference between barely understanding a work, and entering into the whole sense and spirit of it ; and this distinction will serve to explain how the greatest part of the works of genius are and are not, at the same time, to the level of all capacities. To give some instances, the *Adventures of Telemachus*, and *Boileau's* and *Rousseau's* poems, contain nothing, have nothing in them but what the generality of readers may understand with ease. Persons must be absolutely without sense and education, to find the least obscurity in these works. In this respect, therefore, they are to the level of all persons that read, and make any use of their understanding. I own, farther, that this class of readers may see a great many of the beauties of such performances ; but it were a mistake to imagine, that they are capable of seeing them all, and in their full extent. I do not barely say, that they would not be able to give an account of them ; but I say, that they would not so much as perceive them, tho' they might perfectly understand the bare meaning and construction of their author in every part of him. For example, A young person, reading this verse in *Virgil*,

Secretosq; pios, his dantem jura Catonem,

understands well enough, that the poet intends

tends to say, that the good have a separate mansion in the *Elysian* fields, and that *Cato* is at the head of them ; but, unless he has a certain degree of taste, he will not enter into the delicacy of this compliment, as simple as it appears. He understands this verse without thinking it finer than any other, and reads it without being at all struck with it, or taking any particular notice of it.

XII.

It requires, perhaps, more taste and genius to be master of the grand beauties of a work, than to discover the faults of it *. A melancholy truth, which experience confirms every day at the expence of authors, and which is enough of itself to prevent all men of genius from writing, that have not a large share of philosophy ! But this principle is the proof of what I am here maintaining. A work is not, properly speaking, within reach of my capacity, any farther than I am able, by myself, or by the assistance of others, to enter thoroughly into all the beauties of it. If I discover only the faults, I have gone through but the easiest part of the business, and have by no means acquired a right of thinking myself superior to the author I criticise : whereas, on the other hand, I might, perhaps, flatter myself into some sort of equality with him, if I

* M. Coypel's dialogue upon the knowledge of painting.

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was as well acquainted as himself with all the finest parts of his performance. To speak out, and say the whole truth, even at the hazard of a paradox : There are some beauties in the first-rate works, which are not thoroughly understood but by the authors themselves. I allow, their self-love frequently heightens these beauties in their own eyes ; but then it is as certain, that we sometimes impute to this cause what is really no more in them than a clearer view, and more sensible impresson, of the excellencies of their own compositions.

How is it possible, if we consider it, but that a good author should have a thorougher taste of the beauties of his own work, than any body else ? In the first place, it is his own performance, and, of consequence, he understands it better, and is more master of it, than any reader can be. At least a single reading is not, in the common course of things, sufficient to make a reader of the quickest apprehension as familiar with a work, as the person who composed it.

In the next place, the author of a good performance has more genius, and also is more master of his art, than the generality of his readers. This last qualification gives him a considerable advantage, even above those who are his equals in point of genius, but have genius only. If the natural taste is not improved by a knowledge of the rules, it will not carry a person far ; at least it will
not

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not carry him through the whole business of criticism, be his taste in ever so high a degree ; and even this knowledge is very imperfect, unless practice be joined with it.

If this last assertion is true, and undoubtedly it is to a certain point, it may at least be affirmed, that the best performances in oratory, poetry, &c. are not thoroughly understood and relished, but by great orators, poets, &c. We tell people sometimes, that such a piece is above their capacity, and that it is not for them to find fault with it. And it might as properly be said, that it is above their capacity, and therefore it is not for them to commend it.

XIII.

It is an easier matter for readers to discover the faults in a work, than to get a thorough insight into the beauties of it. With authors it is just the reverse ; so that authors and readers have need of one another's judgment, and would do well to consult each other in their turn. Indeed, it is customary for authors to ask the opinion of their readers ; and a very reasonable custom it is, and we justly blame those who do not observe it. But would it not be equally reasonable for readers to ask the opinion of authors ? It is pity, I am sure, that this is not generally practicable. For my own part, I have ever done it, where I had an opportunity ; and have always been

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a gainer by it. Good writers have frequently shewn me beauties in their performances, which I had not perceived before, or, at least, not in their full extent. This has convinced me, that it would be their interest to be themselves their own commentators, and publish their works with notes, somewhat like those which Madam *Dacier* has given with her translations. I could wish, for instance, that *Racine* had done it by his tragedies, and had given us, like *Corneille*, some examens of a moderate compass upon each of his pieces. Such remarks would be of great use to a reader, to let him into the beauty of those passages they related to. They would contribute infinitely to his progress, by pointing out to him the sources of fine thought, and disclosing to him all the mysteries of good writing. But there might be some danger, indeed, in such sort of remarks, lest the vanity of those who made them should be too busy in them. We should see authors, perhaps half blindness, half partiality, setting themselves with more zeal, than even the commentators upon the antients, to cry up their low beauties, and palliate their plain faults.

So that, every thing considered, it has been, perhaps, with good reason enough, that authors have not been allowed a privilege of this sort. It is much to be feared, they would strangely abuse the liberty of being their own commentators.

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One of our best poets said to me one day, in a jocular way, as we were talking upon a tragedy of his, that had met with but indifferent success, If I could venture to speak out, I would force you to admire my play; but you would tell me, perhaps, that I was vain; and I should not care to give you an opinion of my genius at the expence of my heart. I had much rather you despised the poet in me, than the man.

XIV.

I believe that some of our best works would be still better than they are, if their authors had followed their own taste intirely in composing them, without having any thing in view but the satisfaction of themselves, and persons of the best capacities. But, instead of this, they have, at the hazard of being not so well liked by the latter, made it too much their aim to please the bulk of readers. They have had an eye to the opinion which the generality of their cotemporaries would form of their works; and this opinion has, in many things, been preferred to their own judgment. A most uneasy part this, for an author to act! the most perfect slavery imaginable! What can be more disagreeable, than for a writer to renounce himself, and not dare to commit himself freely to his own genius, especially when he is fully convinced, that his performance would be the better for it? But, at bottom, this conduct is wise. The appro-
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bation of the multitude is less flattering to a delicate vanity, than the good opinion of a few select judges ; but it may be more advantageous to the fortune. Honour is a fine thing, but it is also a very desirable one to live at ease ; and those who labour for immortality are not forbid to think a little of securing the conveniencies of the present life. But to answer this purpose, it is not sufficient to write for half a score persons, who might, perhaps, be very well content to be your only admirers. They are the many, whom it imports an author to please ; and he can please them only by writing to their capacities.

XV.

A young author had written a comedy with great genius and spirit, and a great variety of the most lively and delicate wit. His plot, though somewhat complicated, was, however, very judicious, well pursued, and well unravelled at last. He went to read it to a very celebrated critic. He had scarce begun reading, but the countenance of his judge opened upon him. A gracious smile rose upon his face every moment. The passages which the author himself was best satisfied with, he distinguished by marks of very particular approbation. He heard him to the end of his performance, with an attention that was itself an encomium. By this time the author had not a doubt left, either about the goodness of his work, or the

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the success of it. Well, Sir, says he, when he had done, what is your opinion of my play? You will not succeed, answered the critic coldly. Three fourths of the pit will not at all understand those passages in your piece, which you are most fond of, and which, between you and me, I am most pleased with myself. None of these strokes, so delicate and ingenious, will ever take with them. They will fly over their heads, too happy still, if they are not hissed! Go read your piece to the gentlemen of the academy, but never give it to the players. In truth, added he, smiling, you are weak enough to write in this refined manner.

XVI.

To laugh and cry are the great pleasures of the theatre, and the mob scarce know any other. It is not altogether so with persons of judgment. These, capable of relishing more kinds of beauty than one in a play, have sometimes supported pieces against the public, which were ill received on account of their not being so interesting, or so diverting, as those it has been used to bestow its applauses upon; and have in such cases brought the public over to their own opinion.

Moliere perceived from the first representation of the Misanthrope, that the people of Paris were more disposed to laugh, than to admire; and that for twenty persons that
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*were capable of relishing his fine strokes, there were a hundred that were offended with them, because they did not understand them. The second representation was yet with less success than the first, and the third with still less than either. They could not at all away with the gravity of that piece *.*

The author of the new *Memoires* of the life and writings of *Moliere* makes the same remark : *The colouring was too faint to strike spectators, who had been used to so much stronger.*

XVII.

The public is frequently brought back from a wrong to a right opinion upon the works of the stage. Cabal, prepossession, or some trifling circumstance or other, often give good or ill success to a piece. The public, this while, cannot be said, properly speaking, to see the piece itself, but is taken up with this circumstance, whatever it be, that is quite foreign to it. When this is removed, it judges right, because it judges only from what it sees, and forms its opinion of the performance from the performance itself. The public too frequently stands in need of being enlighten'd by men of genius. These give their opinion of a work, and the reasons upon which it is founded. What they say makes an impression, and this impression communicates itself insensibly. It

* *Life of Moliere,*

is as a light, which, diffusing itself by degrees, enables the most common capacities to see what they did not see before, and to perceive beauties, which they would never have been able to discover of themselves.

There may be room enough sometimes for calling persons tastes in question ; because our taste depends, on many occasions, upon the disposition and circumstances in which we form it. This holds good, in some degree, even with respect to those beauties which are more particularly called beauties of sentiment. It very frequently happens, that a tragedy we were but little affected with at the first representation, touches us strongly at the second ; and this is sometimes the effect of reflections which we either made of ourselves, or which it set us upon making in the interval.

XVIII.

There are several plays, both tragedies and comedies, which make as much impression at the representation, and give as much pleasure to a great many of the spectators, as the best tragedies of *Corneille* and *Racine*, and the best comedies of *Moliere*, that yet are not thought near so good, even by those who go to plays merely for the sake of being softened or diverted. This, indeed, is not their own natural judgment of them ; and, if they were to regard only the impressions they receive severally from these pieces, they would think

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think them equally good. But, by little and little, the men of judgment have brought them to think otherwise. They have told them, that there are two sorts of faults, and two sorts of beauties in plays.

Some of these faults hurt the success of a piece ; others not at all, or very little. In like manner, some of these beauties contribute to the success of it, others not. But as these faults, which are no hindrance to a piece's succeeding upon the stage, do frequently, in spite of its success, give real judges a mean opinion of it ; so the beauties, which have no share in giving a piece a success in the theatre, have often the greatest in procuring it the good opinion of the judges, and, by a natural consequence, that of the public. In a word, there are in plays both beauties and faults, which, though of little consequence to their taking upon the stage, yet contribute considerably to determine the character of those in which they are found.

XIX.

It does not follow, that a play should make any great impression upon some certain persons, because it does upon others, who have very fine understandings, and very delicate sentiments.

It must, of necessity, be thought cold and spiritless by those who have none, or who have less of these qualities. Such persons require

quire something of a stronger and more substantial sort to move them. *A connoisseur shall be in raptures, where a person of common make shall not feel the least emotion* *.

It is with poetry as it is with eloquence : the same discourse affects some, and has no effect upon others, not only upon account of the different state of mens hearts, but also of their different capacities and degrees of understanding. Father *****, when he preached at *Versailles*, awakened the court, but set the parish to sleep.

XX.

There are dramatic pieces, that require an elevation of heart and understanding in the spectators, and will affect them but in proportion as they are capable of thinking and feeling (if I may say so) in an elevated manner : such are, for instance, the tragedies of *Corneille* ; and it is one of the reasons, why they are commonly less admired, than those of *Racine*. The heart of the *French* has more of the tender in it, than the magnanimous.

XXI.

The greatest part of the pieces, that are highest in the public esteem at this time, have arrived to this fortune very gradually. Too bold a success at first is but a bad omen

* *Journal de Trevoux, November 1735.*

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of what is to come after, and frequently proves nothing but the indifference of a performance. The beauties that are to the level of all capacities, have soon done their business; while the grand beauties of all are sometimes less striking; and it is seldom, that a work of the first merit immediately gains the opinions of the majority. The public approbation is never more constant, than when it is for a time suspended.

XXII.

See, then, the true sense and limits of this maxim, that a person should write for all the world, and endeavour to please every body.

Is it meant, that a person writes ill, unless he adapts himself to all capacities, and writes in such a manner as will be equally relished by all sorts of people? This can never be maintained; for, on one hand, there is something in every subject, that can, and something that cannot, be suited to all apprehensions. On the other, it is very allowable to write only to the men of genius, even upon subjects where there is no absolute impossibility of treating them to the common level.

But may not it be allowed to mean, at least, that a good performance, which pleases every body, is, on that account, to be thought preferable to all others not so generally relished, however in esteem with the
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men of genius? Even this is false. The tragedies of *Racine*, for instance, please every body very much, both in the reading, and the representation: you cannot find an exception. Now I divide these approvers of them into two parts. I set the best judges, those who have most taste and feeling, on one side, and those who have not so much, on the other; and this done, I say, that if there were tragedies more to the taste of the first half of my judges, than those of *Racine*; these tragedies, though less to the taste of the other half, would be still better than those of this great poet. I add, that I am not supposing any thing that is impossible.

But, lastly, Is it only meant, that a performance, how good soever it be, if it is not to the level of the world in general, will have few readers, still fewer friends, and consequently will not obtain a general success, or, however, not till after a long time? If this is what is meant by this maxim, it is true; and it is what I have said more than once myself. To write for all the world, though it is not the way, properly speaking, to write well, much less to make one of the first writers; yet it is the way, if a person does write well, to meet with success. In short, this is a maxim, that prudence may sometimes dictate, rather than a precept of art.

XXIII.

As to those who are more desirous of pleasing posterity, than their own age, who are ambitious of a lasting honour, rather than a transient success; prudence undoubtedly directs them to write for the few. The fate of a work intended for common readers is, for the most part, to stay with them, and never be known to persons of superior understanding. But, on the other hand, a work intended for the few, frequently comes, by the help of time, into the hands of all the world. The men of taste, by little and little, improve the judgment of their inferiors. The latter think it does them credit, to be of the opinion of those who are allowed to have the greatest share of knowledge and discernment. The vanity which at first makes them talk, in time brings them to think and feel, like their superiors. Thus the judgment of the public improving itself daily, a work that was too strong for it a hundred years ago, may, by this time, be quite to its taste. It is certain, we are more enlightened than our ancestors, and, it is probable, our posterity may be more so than ourselves. It may, therefore, very possibly happen, that they will make but little account of some works in high esteem with us; and again, that they will set much by others, to which
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we have not done perfect justice. Besides, there are, at all times, some men of genius, who judge as posterity itself will one day do. There is at all times, if I may say so, a living posterity.





A

S E Q U E L

T O T H E

Reflections upon TASTE.



Know a person of capacity, who is not quite satisfied with what I have advanced after *M. Coypel*, in the foregoing reflections; *viz.* *That it requires more taste and genius to enter thoroughly into the grand beauties of a work, than to discover the faults of it.* *M. Coypel* himself says it, but with a *perhaps*; which intimates, that he was in doubt whether this assertion were true, or, at least, whether every body might think it so. Hear, now, the opinion of this gentleman I have been speaking of, upon this point, *viz.* Whether there be more difficulty in discovering the faults, or the beauties, of a work.

It is certain, says he to me one day, that there are some beauties of so delicate a nature, that the generality of readers are not capable

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capable of perceiving them, at least, in their full extent ; but then there are also faults, and these very gross ones, which escape the generality, and are discerned only by men of skill. When I say, that a gross fault may escape the generality of readers, I say nothing that is absurd, and that experience does not confirm. A gross fault is not only such a one as every reader is capable of perceiving of himself, but also such a one as he must own to be a gross one, when it is pointed out and explained to him. We find ourselves surprised every day, at our not having observed such faults in a performance, as appear to us very gross ones, when once we come to take notice of them.

But if the most considerable faults frequently escape persons, who read a work with the greatest share of capacity and attention ; does it happen in the same manner to such persons, unless where there is prejudice in the case, that they are not sensible of the beauties of it ? That they read or hear a fine passage, without being struck with it ? I believe this cannot be said, and I affirm, that a *Connoisseur* will sooner pass by a fault, than a beauty, without perceiving it.

II.

Why should a discourse we think admirable in the mouth of the orator, appear to us so indifferent sometimes upon reading ? Is it only because it wants upon paper the

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graces of action? No, certainly; but it is also because the quickness of delivery has allowed us no more than a superficial examination of it. But, in such an examination as this, we see and are affected with nothing but what is most obvious and striking. We see the beauties better than the faults.

Whence comes the transient success of so many performances, but from our having observed at first only what was good in them? They sink in our good opinion, and lose their ground in proportion as we examine them. Time makes us discover every day new faults in them.

No tragedy had ever so swift a success as the *Cid* of *Corneille*. The grand beauties of this piece struck and dazzled all the world. I allow too, that there were some faults found in it; but the criticisms of the academy discovered several, which had not been observed by any body before, and were even taken for beauties. The piece was, and always will be admired; but people came, by little, to see through that mist, which had covered the faults of it. Perhaps too the academy itself might not observe them all; and I do not doubt but, if they were to take this tragedy under their consideration again, they would add several things to their *Critique* upon it. In a word, the beauties of this play were as well known as they are at this time; but the faults are better known now, than they were then.

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The conversations of *Aristus* and *Eugenio*, by father *Bouhours*, were extremely to the public taste. The style of them is pure and delicate, and this was the principal cause of their success. The manner set off the matter of them. But, upon reading the *Sentiments* of *Eleanthe*, those who had been the greatest admirers of this work, abated considerably of the too good opinion they had entertained of it. Every body agreed with the author of the *Sentiments*, that the author of the conversations had taken much more care about words than things; which occasioned somebody to say, That father *Bouhours* wanted nothing to make him a good writer, but to know how to think. This was humorously said, but rather too severe.

III.

As much disposed as the world is to judge on the worst side, says M. Rochefoucault, yet still it oftener favours false merit, than it does injustice to true. And this holds good of every kind of merit, that of the understanding, as well as that of the morals; personal merit, as well as that of performances; of merit in every state, and every profession. We try to discover the faults in every thing; we observe, we examine, with scarce any other view; and yet these faults conceal themselves, and escape all our researches. The weakness of our understanding but ill seconds the malignity of our hearts.

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It is certain, therefore, in general, that beauties are much better perceived than faults. You will tell me, perhaps, added he, (whose discourse I have only been repeating) that we are fonder of talking of the faults of a work, than of its beauties; which could not be, if it was harder to discover them.

But, first, the fact alleged is so far from invalidating, that it proves the maxim I am supporting. For, as you have said yourself, one of the motives which lead us to talk of the faults of works, rather than their beauties, is, that it does us more credit. And therefore it must be commonly apprehended, that there is most difficulty in discovering faults; and thus the objection becomes a proof on my side.

Secondly, We are fonder of talking of faults than beauties, because it is easier to give a reason for what we say in this case, than the other; and see, now, what has been the mistake of those who have advanced the maxim I am opposing. They have not sufficiently attended to the difference there is between discovering what a thing is, and giving the reasons why it is so. The great difficulty with respect to faults, in works of genius, lies in observing them; but it is commonly easy, when we have found them out, to shew wherein they consist. On the contrary, the difficulty with regard to the beauties of a work,
is

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is not to perceive them, but to give the reasons, in a clear and distinct manner, why we think them so.

All this, perhaps, might require to be treated in a larger compass, to make it thoroughly understood ; but I believe I have said enough for those who are pleased with discussions of this kind. See now some other maxims founded upon the opposite opinion.

IV.

There needs nothing but taste to perceive the merit of some works. There must be capacity, and even genius, to find out that of others.

The first and lowest degree of taste in matters of wit, is, never to take the bad for the good ; never to like any thing but what is good. The second is, never to take the good for the bad, and to like every thing that is good. Yet between these two degrees there is a great distance.

I will not say, however, that a person has no taste, because he approves and is pleased with indifferent performances, provided, at the same time, he proportionably likes and approves such as really deserve it. A person may be, and not be at the same time, nice in his taste of some things, as for instance, of poetry, music, &c. He is nice, if he distinguishes and feels with exactness, the different degrees of middling, the good, and the excellent : he is not nice, if, by the quick-

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quickness of his taste for things of this kind, he is yet capable of receiving pleasure from the meanest.

V.

To have taste according to the common notion, is scarce any thing more than to be a critic in style.

To like only works of a certain kind, as small poems, tales, &c. and, in works of greater length, to be taken up with such minute things as turns and expressions, and neglect the main of all, the plan and the conduct of a work ; to think well of no more than one author in each kind ; to make him your idol ; to despise and undervalue every other ; is this to have a taste ? Certainly it is not. It is, however, a good method to pass with a vast many people for having a great share.

VI.

Now I love and esteem the man of candour and taste, who knows and relieth good writing where-ever he finds it. The fire of *Homer*, the judiciousness of *Virgil*, the sublimity of *Corneille*, and the elegance of *Racine*, charm him by turns, and receive his applause, which he always proportions to the degree of merit in the object. He knows how to admire, to esteem, and to approve. He prefers some, but never excludes any. He says, Such a work is more to my taste than another ; and he gives his reasons
why

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why he likes it ; for he thinks it allowable to bring reasons to justify his taste ; but he sees, equally without pain and surprize, that others differ in their taste and judgment from him.

VII.

The true beauties and excellencies of writing are those that please persons of taste and genius. The goodness of a performance is the measure of their pleasure, as the degree of their pleasure is a proof of the goodness of the work. But, frequently, that which gives very considerable pleasure to persons of capacity, gives less, or, perhaps none at all, to persons of meaner parts ; and it is very natural it should be so. The exact judgment is not in all matters that of the greatest number in general ; but it is the judgment of the greatest number of those who have proper capacity, knowledge, and experience, for making a judgment upon the thing in question : it is, if I may say so, the most common opinion among persons the most uncommon.

But it will be said, that good taste passes insensibly from one to the other, till at last they are all of one opinion.

This is true, as far as it goes. What a person of fine parts, and good taste, sees at once, another takes in by little and little. A second reading shall discover beauties to him, he had not perceived at first. A third shall set him in a still better capacity of judging,

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judging, especially if he borrows light from a true critic; that is to say, a person of equal candour, taste, and judgment. For it is not altogether with the taste of the mind; as with that of the body; with a good performance, as with a good ragoût; and it is certain, we sometimes strangely misapply the comparison. If I do not find a ragoût good, all that can be said to me will not make me think it better; but what may be said to me upon a good performance, may a good deal contribute to make me more sensible of its beauty. The taste of the mind is capable of instruction, whereas that of the body is not.

When a good critic reasons with a person of inferior knowledge and judgment, in order to bring him over to his own opinion, upon some piece he thinks well of, his design is not to prove to him, that the piece does really affect and interest him, nor yet that it ought to do so; but all he aims at is only to put him in a condition of receiving a more agreeable impression from it, at a second reading or representation; and this sometimes succeeds. There is no proving effectually to any one, that he ought to like a piece which he does not, but by bringing it to pass, that he shall like it; a thing not at all impossible in many cases to be effected.

To speak exactly, a thing which does not please, ought not to please. But when
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it is said, that a work which does not please a person, ought to please him ; it is only meant, that it would please him, if he had a better taste and judgment, or was better acquainted with it.

VIII.

I set a restriction, above, upon a maxim that is sometimes advanced, that all the world come to one opinion, in time, upon works of wit. I said, this was true, as far as it went. Let me now explain myself. All the world, it is allowed, after a certain time, agree to talk in the same way, of a good piece which has been consecrated by the public opinion. All the world, for instance, says, that the *Misanthrope* of *Moliere* is the best of all our comedies ; but this is not the opinion, or, at least, not the taste of all. To make a real agreement upon this point, it were necessary, that every body should receive more pleasure from the representation and reading of this piece, than from that of every other comedy. But this is not the case. I appeal, for the truth of what I say, to the sincerity of my readers. The chief thing that hinder'd the success of the *Misanthrope* at its first appearance, remains to this day with a great many people ; it does not make them laugh. People say, notwithstanding, that it is an admirable play, because they could not say otherwise, without doing themselves discredit. By frequently

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ly saying this, and hearing it said by others, it comes to be their own opinion in time, and even their taste, to a certain degree. They laugh a little at the representation of this piece; but not enough to be able to say with sincerity, that of all comedies it is that which gives them most pleasure,

I do not believe, that *Moliere* consulted his servant upon this piece. It was not at all to her taste. If he consulted her now-and-then, upon others, it was because he had a mind sometimes to humour his actors; and it were to be wished, indeed, that he had not done it so often.

If I was to write a comedy, the passages, upon which I should be most desirous to take the opinion of persons of good sense, and exact taste, should be those which appeared to me the most properly adapted to the taste of the populace. The more likely any passage is to set a house a laughing, the more danger there is of giving offence to men of sense and virtue.



THE
DISTINCTION
BETWEEN
PRIDE and VANITY.



ONE of our best writers distinguishes pride from vanity in this manner. *I understand by pride, says he, a high opinion of one's own merit, and one's superiority to others. By vanity I mean, the desire of possessing men with an opinion of one's self, and one's abilities, and the preferring this opinion of other people even to real merit itself.* It may be very proper to admit these definitions (and, indeed, I have already made use of them) in order to distinguish the better between some terms which are very commonly confounded upon this subject; and, by that means, between the ideas themselves. To pride, therefore, I would oppose modesty, and humility to vanity: for it is the property of humility

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not to seek the esteem and the praises of men ; nay, it goes so far as even to desire their neglect, their contempt itself, however undeserved. Vanity is not condemned by any morals purely human. These make a virtue of it, under the name of the love of glory. The vain man, very far from giving offence to other people, flatters them, and does them a kind of honour, as the same author remarks ; *because he looks upon them as his judges, and has no greater ambition than to secure them in his favour.* Persons are not hated for loving praise, but for thinking they have too good a right to it. The christian morals, on the other hand, condemn vanity, and do not condemn pride, or a good opinion of one's self, as a vice, properly speaking, but when it is the effect of vanity, and has its source in the corruption of the heart, rather than in the weakness of the understanding.

II.

All our passions may be considered in reference both to the heart, and to the understanding. Every passion is a combination of certain desires and inclinations, and certain judgments and opinions. And therefore I affirm, that you shall find a good deal of difference between the vanity of a man of sense, and that of a fool, if you consider them with regard to their understanding ; but they are the same, considered with respect

spect of the heart : from whence it follows, that they differ from one another but in that which is least essential ; for the essence of passion lies in the heart. The vanity of a fool, and that of a man of sense, consist equally in the desire of honour and distinction ; but that of the latter is judicious and well chosen. It has for its object that honour and distinction which result from things truly commendable, and esteemable for their own sakes ; whereas the vanity of a fool is confined to low and contemptible objects. The man of genius desires the reputation of being so : he is ambitious, that the work he has composed should be preferred before that of his rivals, &c. while the fool would fain pass for being richer, keeping a better table, having a finer house, and grander equipage, than other people. The understanding, to talk philosophically, is better regulated in the man of sense ; his ideas are more just, but his inclinations are not more rectified, than his opposites. We should do every thing that is right, purely because it is so. Every other motive, even that of glory, is imperfect. It corrupts and debases the heart, which ought to be swayed by nothing but the love of order. There is nothing great but this principle. Every other, to speak exactly, is little and despicable. The love of glory must nevertheless be encouraged among mankind, by way of supplement to the love
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of order and virtue, which is too weak, in the generality of men, to surmount the great difficulties that commonly attend upon virtuous and heroic actions. It is better to do well from an imperfect motive, than not to do it at all. If this is but doing ill, as some may think, yet still it is always a means of coming to do well. *Montaigne* says, upon this subject, *Since men are incapable of paying their full debt in good money, let them make it out with bad.*

III.

From a desire of the esteem of mankind, arises a desire of every thing that procures it ; and as, by a natural imposition, which the heart passes upon the understanding, we easily believe what we wish, the desire of every thing, that is esteemable, produces the persuasion, that we are in fact possessed of it. Thus, our love for esteem is almost always the principal reason of the good opinion which we have of ourselves. Vanity produces self-conceit ; pride, contempt of others.

Self-conceit, in a man of sense, is more a vice than it is in a fool. Fools have commonly more self-conceit, than men of sense ; because they have a share of it as they are blockheads, and another as they are vain.

There

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There is a possibility of a person's having self-conceit without vanity, and vanity without self-conceit.

It would be a sort of humility in a person, who, thinking himself, by a mere error of understanding, to have more merit than he really had, should endeavour to pass but precisely for what he thought himself. He would not stop here, if he was vain.

IV.

There is no self-conceit in a person's thinking he has great talents and endowments, if he really has them. A person is self-conceited only, so far as he is deceived in the good opinion he has of himself. He that is deceived much, is conceited much ; and he who is deceived a little, is conceited but a little. Thus a man of sense is often less self-conceited, in thinking himself capable of great things, than a blockhead is, who fancies himself capable of moderate ones.

V.

A blockhead, that thinks himself a person of good sense, gives us less offence, than a man of sense, who thinks himself a great genius ; yet the former is not less mistaken than the latter. But the difference is this : the one, at most, makes himself but our equal ; the other exalts himself above us, and for that reason is more odious.

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VI.

Every one thinks, that he knows himself, and that others do not know him. Men, at least men of good sense, know themselves better than they appear to do. They do not always believe every thing they say to their own advantage, and all they would have other people believe. They have commonly more vanity than self-conceit. The self-love which makes them think of themselves beyond the truth, makes them talk of themselves still beyond what they think. Every man of vanity is a liar ; and we might tell the generality of those who proclaim their own merit, that we should wrong them to imagine they spoke from their heart, and were capable of being so grossly mistaken upon their subject.

A man of fine sense would often surprise his admirers, and disarm the envy of his enemies, if he was to let them know how little esteem he had for himself.





O F

Those who praise Themselves.



THE way to give most pleasure to a vain proud person, is not always to praise him ; it is sometimes to hear him praise himself. Besides that he thinks himself better acquainted with his own merit, than any body else is, and consequently, better able to give an account of it ; he has a double pleasure in praising himself, that of entertaining you with a thing he is full of, and is always thinking upon, and that of imagining, that he is increasing your esteem for him. But now it flatters him a good deal more to increase your esteem for him, than barely to receive the marks of it.

Besides, to praise a person may be no more than the effect of politeness : but to hear him with attention when he praises himself, to hear him as long as he has a mind to talk, to appear to take pleasure in his discourse, to engage him artfully to continue it, to inspire him with a confidence which may make him talk without reserve, and with an intire freedom ; this goes much

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beyond a mere politeness. No praise you could give, would carry half so natural an air with it.

II.

It is not easy to praise a proud man to his liking. Too much, and too little, have their inconveniencies. Too little offends him. He looks upon it as an injury done him. He had rather you would not praise him at all ; because then you would not tell him positively how little you esteem him : for, to praise but little, is to tell him in effect, that you have but little esteem for him.

On the other hand, again, he may know, perhaps, that he is vain, or, at least, that he is suspected of being so ; and upon that account, as greedy as he may be of praise, he may take an excess of it for raillery, and a reproof of his vanity. But a person has nothing of all this to fear, from hearing him praise himself. Such an attentive silence can scarce help being interpreted favourably ; and tho' it is sometimes, indeed, the effect of complaisance, yet it is a sort of complaisance that is performed with so much difficulty, that your behaviour is the less likely to be imputed to it : for it is rare but some token of spleen and disgust will escape the most complaisant hearer on this occasion, and more especially one who acts a forced part. It is seldom but what the air of his countenance will make a discovery of his thoughts.

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thoughts. Now, if a person is master enough of himself, and has constraint enough to carry on his part to the last, how is it possible the imposition should not take? And may not the person he has a design upon, very well persuade himself, that he who hears him in this manner, believes him too?

III.

Though it be a grosser kind of pride to praise one's self, than to appear to receive the praises of others with pleasure; yet there are proud people, who, though they affect the utmost dislike of being praised by any body else, will praise themselves very liberally. It is because they do it without perceiving it. When another person praises them, they are upon their guard, and appear modest. When they come to praise themselves, they forget both themselves, and all the rules of decency, and are quite extravagant. There are two contrary methods of bringing them to this pitch; either by flattering, applauding them, and pretending to give into their sentiments, or else by contradicting them. The first is tiresome enough. The other is, at least, agreeable in this respect, that you speak your real mind. But you have, besides, the satisfaction of mortifying their pride, and enjoying their peevishness. The effects of a pride thoroughly enraged are sometimes so pleasant, that it is a hard matter to forbear laughing at them:

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and a scene of this kind is frequently at an end, because neither the opponent nor bystanders are able to contain any longer. This method of setting a proud person upon praising himself, is likewise the most certain one ; and there are few of this turn, whom it will not succeed upon. It is rather too visibly ridiculous, for a person to be instantly elated with the commendations of other people ; and it is easier in this case to be upon our guard. But we naturally think we have a right to repel contempt, and it is a difficult matter to repel it without passion. But a person in a passion is not master of what he says ; and experience shews us every day, in the most trifling things, that contradiction on one side naturally carries us to extravagance on the other.





R E M A R K S

Upon some Passages in the

PREFACE to M. BOILEAU's *Works*.

I.



ET a performance be ever so well approved of by a few judges ; yet, if it abounds not in a certain beauty and agreeableness proper to hit the taste of the generality of the world, it will never pass for a good one ; and it must happen, in time, that the judges themselves will own themselves mistaken in their good opinion of it.

If M. Boileau only meant, that the best judges find themselves sometimes mistaken in the judgment they make upon a piece, he has said nothing but what experience will justify : but if his meaning be, that opinions upon works of wit are rather to be counted, than weighed ; and that a performance written more to the taste of the men of judgment and abilities, than to that of the common run of readers, is not a good one ;

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I believe that he is mistaken himself, and that this is a maxim which cannot be approved of, but by such authors and readers, as have an interest in approving it. It is certain there are some works in high esteem with the good judges, that are not so well relished by the generality as others, which, again, are in less credit with the men of judgment. But to pretend, that the best of such performances are those which are best liked by the generality of readers, is, as I have said elsewhere, an insupportable paradox.

II.

If I should be asked, in what this beauty and agreeableness consists; I answer, That it is a Je ne sçai quoi, something that may be much better felt, than expressed. In my opinion, however, it consists principally in never presenting the reader with any thoughts but what are true, or any expressions but what are just.

If the beauty of works of wit consists in presenting the reader with true thoughts, and just expressions, it is no longer a *Je ne sçai quoy*, which may be better felt than defined. M. Boileau adds the word *principally*; but still, this is not saying enough. The beauty of works of entertainment is something above the bare truth of thoughts, and justness of expressions. The beautiful, the fine, is the object of taste; but a person cannot always give a reason for his taste.

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A thing pleases us often, without our being able to say, without our knowing, why it pleases us ; which would not be the case, if the beautiful consisted principally in the true, for there is always a reason to be given of the true.

The beautiful is the true, well expressed ; that is to say, expressed with spirit and delicacy, and not merely with justness. The truth of thoughts, and justness of expressions, amount to nothing more than the good. If the thoughts of a work are true, and at the same time new ; if the expressions are just, and also delicate, sublime, &c. you have then the beautiful, and in its highest perfection ; for there are lower degrees of it. A thought that is new in itself, has no occasion to be set off by a turn of expression, it is sufficient, if it be expressed with justness. In like manner, an ingenious turn is frequently sufficient to give beauty to a thought, common enough in itself, and to make it appear a very fine one. So that, with regard to thought, the good consists in the truth, the beautiful in the newness of it : with regard to expression, the good consists in the justness, the beautiful in the elegance, delicacy, &c. of it. The beautiful, therefore, supposes the good ; but the good is more essential, more important, than the beautiful. And, consequently, it may be said, that the excellence of a work being the effect of the good
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and beautiful united, it consists principally in the good, in the truth of the thoughts, and the justness of the expressions. But it must not be said, that the beautiful consists principally in the truth of the thoughts, and justness of expressions ; for this would be to say, that it consists principally in the good, and consequently to make an utter confusion in all our ideas.

III.

It must be observed, that M. *Boileau* is speaking of works of wit, in the passage I have quoted from him, of such works as the author would build the reputation of a man of wit upon, or, to say every thing, of a *bel esprit*. But, as M. *Huet* has said, a *bel esprit*, that deserves the title, is necessarily a person of good genius ; though a person of good genius is not always a *bel esprit*, or a fine genius. For the same reason, a thought, in order to be a fine one, ought to be true ; but a thought is not, properly speaking, fine, because it is true. I allow, that a thought that is both true and new, will always please, if it is well expressed ; but, among several methods of expressing the same thought, there may be some more agreeable than others ; and it is this agreeableness, arising from the turn and manner of expressing a thing, which it is sometimes so hard to give an account of. A work may intitle its author to the character of a good genius, or
even

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even a great one, without giving him that of a fine one, or a *bel esprit*. It is, properly speaking, this last sort of reputation, which the authors of works of entertainment aim at. The *French* academy, composed, for the most part, of this class of writers, was intitled, at its first foundation, the *Academy of beaux esprits*, or fine geniuses. This name is very just, as it points out its principal object, and characterizes it better than that of the *French* academy; but, perhaps, it is not honourable enough. It is now a long time since the title of a *bel esprit* has been looked upon as an affront. There are numbers of people that despise this sort of genius, and all that it can produce. A work is agreeable enough for them, when it is judicious and solid; and is fine enough, if it be but good. There is, however, a considerable difference between a good work and a fine one. To illustrate my meaning by some instances taken from different ages, I should not scruple to say, that the works of *Quintilian*, *Cibarron*, and the abbot *de Fleury*, are very good; and those of *Tully*, *Montaigne*, and *Bossuet*, very fine. There is something common to all those works, by virtue of which they deserve the title of good. I mean, the truth of the thoughts, and, as far as that holds in each, the exactness, propriety, and other qualities of style; but, at the same time, there is something in those works I call fine, which is wanting
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in the others, and by means of which they are far superior to them. The authors of those I mentioned the first, were men of exceeding good sense and understanding. The authors of the second were, besides all this, men of genius and imagination; and it belongs only to writers of this character, to compose fine works. A fine performance, one that pleases and delights us, is, properly speaking, one in which we feel genius and imagination. If all the thoughts in such a performance are not exactly true, nor the expressions perfectly just, yet such is the effect of that genius and imagination which shine through the whole, that it hinders a reader from perceiving it, gives him so lively a pleasure, and keeps him in so constant an admiration, that he has not time to take notice of faults so skilfully covered, or so happily atoned for. But I do not mean, by imagination, only such a degree of heat and enthusiasm, as makes orators and poets. An imagination less lively and strong, than delicate and gracious, is also a source of infinite beauties; witness the writings, and especially the conversation, of women of parts.

IV.

Plato compares rhetoric to the art of cookery. According to this, I may compare a performance, that is not only a sensible, but an ingenious one, not only a good, but a fine one, to a good eatable ragoutted by
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an able cook (Allow me to use the terms themselves, because a circumlocution would not so well express my meaning). I ask M. *Boileau*, therefore, why such a performance pleases him. He will answer, It is because it presents him with no thoughts but what are true, and no expressions but what are just. This is just as if I should ask a person I observed to eat a ragoût with pleasure, why he thought it a good one; and he should tell me, It was chiefly, because the meat was good and well-dressed. It is obvious, at first sight, that this is exactly M. *Boileau*'s answer. I leave it to the reader to follow the comparison of the art of cookery with that of writing. It is a very proper one for illustrating the point in question; but, perhaps, too ignoble to carry it into particulars.

V.

The finest thoughts of M. *Flecbier*, *Bruyere*, and even *Boileau* himself, stript of their ornaments, and expressed, tho' justly, yet in a plain and simple manner, would no longer appear beautiful. It might be easy to give instances; but this is a thing much better left to the reader.

VI.

With respect to thoughts, there are two sorts of truth; and, with respect to expressions, two kinds of justness. There is a truth,

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truth, and a justness, that pleases; and another, which gives no pleasure at all, and with which a person is barely secured from censure, without being intitled to praise. It must not be said, therefore, *that the beauty of works of wit consists in presenting the reader with no thoughts but what are true, and no expressions but what are just.* It must only be said, that this is the first condition required in a fine performance. It must not be said, that a thought is beautiful, only in regard of its being true; and an expression, in regard of its being just; but that a thought is never beautiful, except it is true; nor an expression, but when it is just. This is all that we can grant to M. Boileau upon this point.

VII.

He quotes the famous answer of *Lewis* the XIIth to some of his ministers, who advised him to put several persons to death, who in the preceding reign, and when that prince was only duke of *Orleans*, had been in measures that deserved it.

The king of *France*, replied he, must not revenge the duke of *Orleans's* quarrels. *Whence comes it, adds Boileau, that this answer immediately strikes us? Is it not easy to see, that it is because it presents us with a truth which all the world understands, and which is here expressed in a finer manner, than in the finest treatises of morality? viz, that a great prince, when he is once upon the throne,*

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throne, ought no longer to be governed by private motives, nor to have any other view, but that of the glory and happiness of his kingdom.

I ask, now, in my turn, Whence comes it, that this answer of *Lewis XII.* pleases us infinitely more, than the maxim, upon which it is, in a manner, founded, and which is but a paraphrase of it? If the answer presents us with a truth, which all the world understands; the maxim does the same, and in expressions as just as can be. And yet this reply of the king's expresses this truth, *better than all the finest discourses of morality.* But why does it express it better? This is what M. *Boileau* does not tell us. He only informs us, that it contains a truth, without which it would not, or, at least, ought not to please us.

The author of *the Beauties of Language reduced to their Principles* (one of the best pieces, which a philosophical genius, applied to the *belles lettres*, has ever produced) gives us the true reason of the pleasure which we receive from this answer of *Lewis XII.* *The duplicity of persons it supposes in one and the same man, says he, causes a kind of surprize to the mind, which makes it more attentive to the truth which is presented to it.* This surprize arises from the apparent falsity there is, in supposing two persons in one man. So that the king's reply pleases us, both by the truth that is contained in

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it, and that kind of falshood it presents us with, *viz.* that *Lewis* the XIIth, king of *France*, was not the same man who had been before duke of *Orleans*, and that the injuries done to the latter did no way concern him. I own, this kind of falsity would have nothing agreeable in it, without the truth that is couched under it; but neither would this truth, expressed in a plain and simple manner, have any thing that could strike and affect us. It is the turn that gives value to the thought: it is that which gives it its principal beauty. The proof of what I say, or, rather, of what the author I have been quoting says, is this, That any truth expressed in the same manner, that is to say, by doubling a single subject, and distinguishing it from itself, will always please us. For instance, take the reply, which it is pretended a peasant made to an ecclesiastical elector of *Germany*, who took upon him to justify from his quality, as a temporal prince, a conduct not very becoming the prelate: *If my lord elector is damned, what will become of my lord archbishop?* This reply, I say, is intirely of the same kind with that of *Lewis XII.* There is the same turn in both. The king's answer is a fine, and the peasant's a humorous one, though it is a very serious truth, that is contained under it. But the same turn may be employ'd in different kinds, and, according to the subjects and occasions it is used upon, it makes sometimes

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times a humorous thought, sometimes a barely agreeable one, sometimes a sublime one. M. Flechier has said, speaking of Lewis XIV.

*His soul is far above his highest greatness :
His virtues give more lustre than his crown ;
And tho' such vast dominions own his sway,
Yet still the hero triumphs o'er the king.*

The king and the hero, says the author of the *Beauties of Language*, &c. unite in the same person, and, in reality, make but one single man ; yet this does not hinder the poet from distinguishing them, and it is by this distinction that he gives a turn to what he says. But, perhaps, this turn begins to be a little too common, and such sort of contrasts have been made a thousand times over.

I allow, says the author of the *Beauties*, &c. that there is something ingenious in M. Boileau's reflection.

If criticism ought always to be polite, it ought more especially to be so, when it is employ'd upon authors of the merit and reputation of M. Boileau. We owe them every kind of respect, and this respect consists not only in giving them the praises due to their genius in general, but also in commending what is good in those very passages we are forced to censure. It is seldom that these great men commit pure and unmixed

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faults, and that we have not an occasion of praising, at the same time that we have room to find fault with them. But I confess freely, I do not see what ingenuity there is in this reflection of M. *Boileau's*. Who is there, that is not capable of making such a remark? And is there any one, who, when he is struck with a fine passage, which he thinks he understands, is not able to express it in other terms, or, at least, to point out, in general, the thought and intention of the person that spoke it? If all those who read or hear that famous answer of the king's, are not capable of forming that *general proposition*, *That a great prince, when he is come to his throne, ought not to act any more from private motives*, &c. there is, however, nobody but what understands, that the king's meaning was, that he was above revenging himself, now he was become a king.

Besides, the author of the *Beauties*, &c. makes it appear, that M. *Boileau* and he have given two different reasons for the beauty of the saying. But this is not all; M. *Boileau* has really not given any reason at all: for the beauty of this saying consists in the lively, delicate, and uncommon manner, in which it expresses a truth, which every body understands. A good saying, says M. *Boileau*, is good only as it contains something which every body thinks, and expresses it in a new and delicate manner.

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It must be shewn, then, in what this beauty of turn and manner consists; this is what all the world does not see; and yet what *M. Boileau* has not told us.

As to accounting for the beauty of this reply of the king's, from the sense which it presents to the mind; it had been better to have said, that it pleases us, as it expresses a noble and generous sentiment, than to attribute this effect of it to the general maxim that may be drawn from it; a maxim very just, indeed, but not capable of pleasing by itself. Every body knows, that sentiments please us a good deal more than mere sentences. And hence that rule laid down by the critics, with respect to dramatic performances, that maxims should be thrown as much as possible into sentiments, and that all maxims in form should be carefully declined. But now this answer of *Lewis XII.* is an expression of the finest of all sentiments; for there is nothing greater than to pardon, when a person has it in his power to revenge himself. It does not only present the mind with a mere simple truth; otherwise common enough; but it shews us a prince thoroughly possessed of that truth, and acting in consequence of it, which is a thing very rare.

And yet it is not in this, neither, that the whole beauty of this answer consists. *Lewis XII.* might have told the persons that were putting him upon revenge, *That a prince,*
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when he is once upon the throne, ought not any longer to be governed by private motives, &c. and he would have delivered a fine maxim. He might have given proof, that this came from his heart, by saying, *I think this revenge you advise me to, a thing unworthy of me*, or somewhat to this effect; and then he would have expressed a fine sentiment. But by answering, *That it was not for a king of France to revenge the quarrels of the duke of Orleans*, he has said at once both a fine thing, and a good one; and this little turn, which might, at first sight, appear but ill-proportioned to the dignity of the sentiment, upon which the reply is founded, adds new beauty to it; not only as it is ingenious, but further, as the king, by not vouchsafing a serious refutation to the advice of his ministers, made it appear, that clemency and mercy were virtues that were natural to him, and which he was master of in the highest degree; and that to pardon cost him none of those efforts, which prove almost as much the strength of a passion, as of the virtue which at length prevails over it. Thus this famous answer was so much the more beautiful, in proportion as it was a good and virtuous one.

VIII.

The mind of man is naturally full of an infinite number of confused ideas of truth, which frequently it has a very imperfect view of;

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of; and nothing is more agreeable to it, than to meet with one of these ideas properly cleared up, and set in a full light.

The moral maxim, which M. Boileau compares with the king's reply, contains a truth properly cleared up, and set in a full light. But, as this truth is sufficiently clear of itself, the more involved and indirect way of expressing it gives us a good deal more pleasure, than the maxim itself.

M. Boileau, in the words I have been quoting, has given a very just character of grave works, and works of instruction; but what he has said, is by no means sufficient to explain the nature of works of wit, properly so called, or to account for the beauty of what we call a happy thought, or good thing.

IX.

What is that may be properly called a new, shining, and extraor'nary thought? It is not, as ignorant people imagine, a thought which nobody else ever had, or would have had. On the contrary, it is such a thought as must have occurred to every body in the like case, and been one of the first in any man's mind upon the same occasion.

A person may be surprised, perhaps, to find the word *extraor'nary* here. It seems to me, that this word, when applied to a thought, is only to be taken in an ill sense, An extraor'nary thought is a whimsical one, a thought vitiously singular, and such a one

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as nobody ever would have had. M. Baileau means it, however, of a fine thought. But he thought the sense of this word sufficiently determined, by the words *new* and *shining*, which come before it; and, indeed, his meaning is clear enough. Therefore, dropping this, I ask, Where are the ignorant people, that imagine a new and a fine thought (for he is here speaking of fine thoughts) to be such a one as *nobody ever would have had*? There are no people so ignorant as this comes to. A thought that nobody else could have had, is a false thought, and even an extravagant one. But all the world agrees in general, that a thought, in order to be fine, ought to be true, though it sometimes happens, even to persons of judgment, to be dazzled with the glare of a false thought, and to suffer themselves to be seduced by a shew of truth. But, for the most part, they see clearly enough, that such thoughts are false, and approve only the ingenious manner in which they are expressed. Some, indeed, value themselves upon being more severe, and liking nothing but what is perfectly just, and not allowing, that there can be any sort of beauty, where a thought is false. But this is wrong; for every thing ought to have its due. A false thought may be expressed with a good deal of wit. I own it is wit ill bestowed; but still it is wit. On such occasions, therefore, one should condemn
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and approve at the same time ; condemn the thought itself, and approve the manner of expressing it.

X.

What is that we call a new thought ? — It is not, as ignorant people imagine, a thought which nobody ever had before.

The ignorant have reason to believe, that a thought they meet with in any work is not new, when they know, that it has occurred to somebody before, and perhaps, too, may be found in some prior performance. It is true, the person that employs this thought after another, may nevertheless have really been the inventor of it. He may be ignorant, that it is any-where else ; and in that case, it is new to him, and to such of his readers as were not acquainted with it, before they saw it in his work. But it is not upon this account any newer in itself.

But, further, the ignorant have reason to look upon a thought, which nobody ever had before, or, at least, is no-where to be found, as a new thought ; and that a work, which contains a good many things of this sort, must be very valuable, provided these thoughts are true ; but then they know very well, that this kind of thoughts are very rarely to be met with. It is possible, however, they may think them more scarce than they are. There have been a great many new things found, since it has been pro-

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pronounced impossible to find any. But one sort of men have said so, because they were conscious they had but little of this kind in their own works; and others, not so much interested in the matter, have yet talked like the first, with a view to enhance the merit of the new things they really have in theirs. It is a matter of high reputation, (and which grows still higher every day, as books multiply) to invent new thoughts: and it is the same to invent new turns, and ways of expressing old ones. For turns are exhausted as well as thoughts, and it would be sometimes a harder thing to express some particular thoughts in a new way, than it was at first to find the thought itself.

XI.

The better to combat this notion, (which, by the way, scarce any one ever entertained) *That a new thought is such a one as nobody would ever have had*, M. Boileau runs quite into the opposite extreme, when he says, *That, on the contrary, it is such a one as must have occurred to every body on the same occasion.* It is true, that sometimes a very bright thought is, at bottom, no more than a common one set off with an ingenious turn. It must be allowed further, that a new thought sometimes appears so natural, that one is surpris'd it should be new, and ready to think, that every man living must have started it. But there are withal some thoughts
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that proclaim and distinguish a superior genius, thoughts which it is apparent the generality are not capable of; and these undoubtedly are the finest thoughts we have. Others may give us pleasure, but these raise our admiration: and an author, who has produced a few such thoughts, has a fair title to be ranked among the great geniuses.

XII.

Since a thought is beautiful only in regard of its being true, &c.

I have already observed, that this ought not to be said, but only that a thought cannot be beautiful, unless it be true, and that too under this restriction, that a thought which is not true may be expressed so ingeniously, as to deserve some approbation on this account.

As a thought is beautiful only in regard of its being true, and it is the infallible effect of truth to strike us when it is well expressed, it follows, that what does not strike us, is neither beautiful nor true, or else is ill expressed.

Is it then the infallible effect of truth, to strike the generality of mankind? If it is, whence comes it, that almost all mankind, the learned as well as the ignorant, are under the power of so many ridiculous prejudices, so many gross errors, although those errors have been opposed and confuted a thousand times over? Men love the truth,
and

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and readily embrace every thing that appears to them in that light ; but the generality of men are very little capable of distinguishing it from falshood, even in the plainest and most common things. *It is not only in the sciences, says the author of the Art of Thinking, that it is difficult to distinguish truth from error ; but also in most of the subjects men talk upon.* So that what M. Boileau says of men in general, that it is an infallible effect of truth to make an impression upon them, cannot be said but of a few exact and penetrating minds ; and the greatest encomium that can be bestowed upon any one with regard to his understanding is to say, that he finds out truth and falshood throughout every subject, where-ever they are, and receives a strong and sensible impression from them.

It will be said, I do not doubt, that M. Boileau means what he says, only of that sort of true and false, which we meet with in works of entertainment. I allow it ; but still he is under a mistake with respect to them. There are no sort of works which give room for so many false judgments, according to the author I just now quoted, as works of this kind. *False judgments are not so common in the arts and sciences, because those who know nothing themselves, are more ready to resign themselves to the judgment of the skilful ; but they are very frequent in the things which belong to the jurisdiction*

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diction of the people, and upon which all the world takes the liberty of judging, such as eloquence, &c. These common judgments, however, are not absolutely false. An orator, that pleases the generality, would not please them, if he had not really genius. In defect of an exact understanding, perhaps, he is endued with a beautiful and shining imagination. If his thoughts are not always just, yet his expression is elegant, his figures bold, and his images lively. He does not enlighten much, but he is entertaining and affecting. A discourse may have beauty or strength, without much justness. These are three things essentially different ; and it is but too usual to see them separated. M. *Boileau* himself has several thoughts that are false, and reasonings that are not exact ; but is admirable in his turn and expression. He is sometimes a bad philosopher, but he is always a great poet, and to this he owes his success. It is the same thing with the generality of orators and poets. We must not look for great justness and exactness of thought in their works. And, indeed, how should we expect it of them ? Orators, and more especially poets, are persons of imagination ; and it is but seldom, we know, that this faculty is joined with a very solid judgment. It would be an affront to a poet, or an orator, to tell him, that he has more judgment than fancy. This would be to tell him, that he is no poet, no orator.

Virgil

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Virgil is the most judicious of all the antient poets ; for instance, he is a good deal more so than *Homer*. All the world agree in giving him this character ; and it is plain at first sight, that it is not the greatest compliment that could be paid him. It would set any other writer, but an orator, or a poet, at the head of his profession, and exalt him above all his rivals. But yet those who value themselves upon being critics in poetry, prefer *Homer* to *Virgil*. Because the first has a good deal more imagination than the latter, they think he has more of the poet. It would be the same with two orators, that should have such a reciprocal advantage of one another, in regard to fancy and judgment. In matters of poetry and eloquence, the prize will always be given to the first of these qualities, in preference to the other.

XIII.

This want of truth and justness, in the greatest part of the most approved performances of this kind, has, in all times, given disgust to many persons of good understanding, and is at the bottom of those accusations so frequently brought against poetry and eloquence. It is said, in reply, that these accusations are unjust, because we ought not to confound the abuse of the art with the art itself, and impute to the arts the faults of the artists. But this answer itself is not just ; for it is not a mere abstract

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abstract idea of poetry and eloquence, that is attacked in these charges, but a thing really existing; poetry and eloquence, such as they are, in the works of the most famous orators and poets. The question is, Whether these works are not full of false thoughts, or, at least, such as are not over-solid? Those who admire them the most, are obliged to own they are. Some have gone so far as to say, that the thoughts in poetry ought not to be regarded; and that nothing is to be considered, but the manner of expressing them. Now, from hence, might it not be fairly concluded, that the eloquence and poetry which are in being, and which we are acquainted with, are not to be very highly thought of, if we may judge of them upon this incontestable principle, that the greatest excellence of a work does not lie in being well written, but in being well thought? But, without doubt, the works of poetry and eloquence ought to be excepted from this rule, and we must be content with maintaining, that they please us chiefly by their style and diction. It is true, there will be no way left to defend them against their adversaries; and, after all, we must allow, that these charges are not without foundation.



O F

P O L I T E N E S S.



Politeness consists in doing and saying nothing, that may give offence to those we converse with ; and in doing and saying every thing that may be agreeable to them ; and this with a certain gracefulness, freedom, and delicacy of behaviour and expression.

We are to consider, then, upon this subject, the things to be said and done, and the manner of saying and doing them.

And this manner, now, is the point of most importance. Let a person be ever so obliging and complaisant, yet, without a certain manner of being so, he may pass for a decent good-natured man, but never a polite one. Politeness must be distinguished even from civility itself. To be polite, implies more, than barely being civil.

The polite man is civil of course ; but the civil one may not be polite, nor can have this word applied to him in its full meaning

ing and extent. Politeness implies civility, and adds something more to it. Civility regards principally the matter of our behaviour; politeness respects also the manner of it.

It is true, civility and politeness are not distinguished in common conversation with such a scrupulous exactness. It might be pedantry to affect it. And yet there may be occasions of applying the distinction very pertinently. For instance, you commend such a person as a polite man. Somebody replies, That this is saying too much of him; that M. **** is not polite, but only civil. If this person is right in his opinion, it must be allowed to be expressed properly; and those who had never thought upon the matter before, will plainly perceive, that these two words civil and polite, are not synonymous; but that the one signifies more than the other, or rather a quite different thing. Civility sets us upon paying every one his due, and treating people with friendship, esteem, observance, or respect, according to the relation they stand in to us. Politeness, properly speaking, is an agreeable and delicate manner of speaking and acting. It is that which the *Romans* called *urbanity*, *urbanitas*, *morum elegantia*. This word *urbanity*, which some persons would have introduced into our language, has not been received into common use, because we have that of politeness, which exactly answers to

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it. One would think, that the word civility signified precisely the same thing with urbanity, if the etymology only was to be regarded ; but custom has given it a narrower signification. A mechanic, a peasant, may be civil ; but it is a man of the world only, that can be polite. So that the terms civility and politeness express rather different qualities, than different degrees of the same quality.

II.

As wit has been called *the seasoning of reason*, politeness may be called *the seasoning of good-nature*. Politeness is the same thing to a good heart, that wit is to good sense. Wit and politeness are the addition of an inexpressible fineness, delicacy, and grace ; the one to reason, and the other to goodness.

But as much company and conversation frequently give an air of wit to persons who have naturally but a very small share of it ; in the same manner, and more frequently, indeed, it gives an appearance of good qualities to those who, in reality, have very bad ones. The politeness of the one is but their ill-temper seasoned, as the wit of the other is but the seasoning of their dulness.

III.

There is a great deal that is purely arbitrary in politeness. The way of saying and doing the same things, and expressing esteem, respect,

respect, and friendship, is different in different countries. An acquaintance with the world, therefore, is the only thing to teach politeness, and to form it in a person's manners. The most particular instructions that can be given, will not take in, for, indeed, they cannot express every thing upon the subject, much less will they communicate a capacity of practising. There is a wide distance between speculative and practical politeness. Every thing that consists in action, is to be learnt by action only.

IV.

There are some persons that have but little politeness in the very centre of politeness, the court itself. Being much in the world, is not always sufficient for acquiring politeness, without the proper natural qualities; as these are not sufficient of themselves, without the use of good company. These qualities are, a great share of humanity and good-nature, a delicacy of thinking to distinguish readily what is proper to be done in all circumstances, a very obsequious temper, a facility of putting on all humours, and taking up any opinion as occasion may require, or, at least, of seeming to do so.

But to practise the disguise and dissimulation that are often necessary for this purpose, is a very hard part. Man is naturally sincere. He loves to speak what he thinks,

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and to give vent to his own genuine sentiments. This disposition in mankind, however laudable in itself, is a great hindrance to politeness, which directs us to do and say nothing that may give offence to others; whence it follows, that a person must not say every thing he thinks, nor do every thing he has an inclination to, not even when his thoughts and inclinations are the most reasonable.

A great part of the faults, that are committed against politeness, proceed from too much sincerity and frankness; from persons not being able to confine themselves to speak and act within the bounds of good breeding, or, at least, on some occasions, to be silent. Such a one, you hear it often said, is a good-natured man, and a man of sense; but he is too plain and downright in conversation. A man of sense sees and hears a thousand things in company, that disgust him in spite of all his good-nature; and he is too apt to discover his uneasiness at them. A person with a clear head, and a good heart, it is allowed, has nothing to disguise or conceal among his equals, and they might justly resent any insincerity in his behaviour to them. But are our equals the only people we converse with? or, rather, where do we find them? The more discernment a person has in his understanding, and (if you will) in his heart, the more occasions he
meets

meets with, in conversing with the world, of disguising his sentiments.

And yet the natural disposition to sincerity is universal enough among mankind. It is true, in fact, that the world is full of cheats and dissemblers ; but then, for the most part, they are not born so, but have acquired the character by practice. They were born, indeed, with passions which they are obliged to conceal, in order to gratify them the better ; but at the same time they are born with a natural propensity to act openly, and appear just what they are. But they have found, by experience, the inconveniences of such a principle ; and it must have cost them great struggles to get the better of it. I appeal, for the truth of this, to the greatest masters in the art of dissimulation. Habit, in this case, never wholly destroys nature. Constant dissimulation is a violent state, a kind of slavery, to which we are not naturally subject. It costs a person more or less struggle, in proportion as he has used it, and in proportion to the ends for which he is forced to practise it ; but it always costs somewhat, and never ceases to be a constraint.

The man, who, of all the world, carried dissimulation and disguise to the greatest height, was pope *Sixtus Quintus* ; and yet he was naturally of a temper the least proper for disguise, for any. The first part of his life presents us with a scene of impru-

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dent warmth, and indiscreet sincerity. His youth, his very infancy itself, gave presages of the great man, and exalted genius ; but the consummate politician, the man of deep artifice and design, were not yet foreseen. He deceived the world with more success, as he had appeared less capable of deceiving. What, now, was the cause of so great a change ? Ambition ; that is to say, the most violent of all our passions. However, it wrought this change in him but very gradually."

The person who practises sincerity on all occasions, will be thought guilty of somewhat more than unpoliteness. As there is commonly more bad than good to say of men, and perpetual temptations to contradict them, either in their opinions, or their passions, a person that should always speak his mind in conversation, must infallibly pass for ill-natured.

V.

It is a hard matter to be polite in our behaviour with those that are disagreeable to us ; and it is the misfortune of men of fine sense, that they meet with few people but what are so. The more sense a person has, the more faults he discovers in other men. Besides, men of sense do not know how to submit to a thousand little formalities, that yet are a part of polite behaviour : so that it is a harder thing to be polite with a fine under-

understanding, than with a common one. But, when a person of this character is polite, he is always more so than other men, and in a more agreeable manner. Every thing that happens is an occasion to him of saying polite things ; and the fine turn he gives them, makes them still more agreeable, provided there be no room to distrust his sincerity. A plain home-spun commendation shall sometimes flatter us more than the most elegant compliment ; because it carries a more genuine and unaffected air with it. When a person praises me with too much ingenuity, I always suspect, that he does it only to shew his wit, and is rather aiming at my good opinion of him, than to testify his own of me. Our vanity is never to be flattered successfully by such things as proceed only from the vanity of other people.

This more elegant and ingenious kind of politeness, which belongs to persons of fine sense only, is rarely to be found beyond a certain degree ; but a little knowledge of the world, good sense, and a good disposition, are sufficient to keep a person from doing and saying any thing that is unpolite. And of this kind is the politeness of the people of moderate capacity, who never fail to make their company agreeable by their complaisance, attention, &c.

VI.

There is an unpoliteness of ill-nature, and an unpoliteness of ill-breeding. It is the latter only that is, properly speaking, unpoliteness; and, in my opinion, the word should be confined to that only. Though an ill-natured satirical person be unpolite in one sense, yet I would not apply the term to such an one, because it does not agree with him in its full sense. Custom, however, has prevailed to the contrary; but this custom itself seems to have been founded in ill-nature. We use the word unpolite, rather than that of ill-natured, because it expresses more. You naturally inspire contempt for the person you charge with unpoliteness, whereas you only excite hatred towards the person you represent as ill-natured; and not always that. We do not heartily hate an ill-natured man, unless we have felt the effects of his ill-nature; whereas an unpolite person is always despised by those who think him so, whether they have ever suffered by him, or not. By ascribing to unpoliteness a word, or an action, we are offended with, we throw all the disgrace of the affront upon the author of it; whereas by complaining of an ill-natured piece of raillery, or a satirical thing that has been said of us, we are apt to give our hearers an idea to our own disadvantage. Our complaints lower us in their opinion, without giving

giving us any revenge upon the person that occasioned them.

VII.

To accuse a person of unpoliteness, is a thing as much to his prejudice as any thing we can say of him ; because it is impossible, that a person of tolerable sense, sobriety, and education, and that keeps good company, can be what we properly call unpolite. He may only be not so polite as some others ; not impeccable in matters of politeness, though his failures will be few and trivial. What is properly unpoliteness, implies several things, that are much to a person's discredit.

VIII.

Persons of much vivacity are not commonly very polite ; yet the greatest vivacity is not in itself any thing disreputable, tho' it be frequently so by means of other failings, that accompany it, and of which it is, in some measure, the principle and the cause.

Persons of a lively make are almost always choleric, impatient, and opinionative, at least by fits ; and such as are not thoroughly acquainted with them, are apt to impute these failings to a worse cause than that of vivacity, *viz.* to pride, and a mean way of thinking. Besides, vivacity occasions people to act precipitately, and without reflection. It hurries the persons it prevails over, from one thing to another, and renders them

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them incapable of that continued attention, without which it is impossible not to commit a thousand faults against politeness.

IX.

It is very difficult for a person to be polite, at least, to be constantly so, that is subject to ill-humour. Aversion and contempt may be dissembled. You may suppress anger, conceal a bad heart, and disguise pride; but ill-humour is, in a manner, untameable. It frequently discomposes the whole man, and is a real malady that calls for physical remedies, rather than moral ones. When the ill fit is over, and the blood has recovered its natural course, and reflection begins to take place again; what blushes and sighs does it cost a person, to think how unreasonable he has been, how easily piqued, how different from himself? What resolutions does he not make, to be more upon his guard for the future? The next day, perhaps, a fit seizes him again, and he falls into the same perverseness.

A person that is subject to this unhappiness, ought to govern himself as much as possible. The impossibility of a complete victory over it will not, however, dispense with his making all the resistance he is able. It is in this, as in every other case: we are excusable for our faults no further than it is out of our power to prevent them. But, as other people are not the less sufferers, for our ill

ill treatment of them being involuntary ; we ought always, for offences of this kind, however unavoidable we may think them, to ask pardon in a very particular manner ; and, when we are masters of our reason, endeavour to atone for our caprice and extravagance, by a more extraordinary measure of observance and politeness. We must be free to confess and acknowledge our weakness, and intreat those who have the misfortune to live with us, to endure us, if it is possible, and, if they will take so much trouble upon them, to govern us.

X.

The character of being polite is one of the most advantageous characters a person can have. There is no other sort of merit that takes universally ; but every body is fond of an acquaintance and intimacy with a polite man. Politeness is, at least, the appearance of the most considerable virtues, and creates both love and esteem.

Politeness is, in one sense, of more importance than good qualities themselves. One may, absolutely speaking, do without friendships ; but there is no doing without society ; and there is no being in society without politeness,

XI.

A desire of being polite frequently throws people into ceremony and affectation, which
is

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is more ridiculous and disagreeable than ill manners itself. A person may offend against good manners by excess as well as defect.

Extravagant and too frequent expressions of esteem and respect, &c. are only troublesome to the persons they are directed to, and therefore contrary to true politeness, the end of which is to please. It is a point of great judgment to adjust them to persons and circumstances. The behaviour that is ceremony with an inferior, or an equal, is but due respect to a superior.

The faults which give us most offence in other people, are generally such as they take for great beauties in their behaviour. There are persons, for instance, that think themselves very polite, when they express their pity for you, whatever pain they may give you by it. This is the most ridiculous impertinence a person can be guilty of. The vanity that is at the bottom of this blunder, and the pride that is the consequence of it, are perfectly intolerable. Such affected and conceited airs are equally offensive to all mankind. The truly polite laugh at them, and those who are not so resent them.

But very often the charge of affectation is without foundation. A person admired for his politeness in town, and at court, would be thought affected in the country. I once knew a country gentleman, who was as polite as he had occasion to be, before he ever saw *Paris*; but thither he went to give the
last

last polish to his behaviour, and shake off every thing that favoured of the country. When he came home again, the gentlemen of his acquaintance thought him quite spoiled and affected to the last degree, and he found by experience, that a person is never the worse liked by some people for a little plainness. Indeed, Sir, says one of them, you must come back again to your old behaviour : you must bring yourself down to the level of the people you are to spend your life with, and have no more politeness about you, than you had a twelve-month ago. We plain folks have no notion of such fine manners. You have quite overdone the matter, with respect to us ; and if you keep on in this way, you will make yourself more ridiculous here, by your *Paris* airs, than the people you now think such, would be at *Paris* with the manners of the country.

XII.

Politeness consisting chiefly in observing decencies ; and the subject of decency being, as was said before, our actions and discourse ; the person that would behave with unexceptionable propriety, and practise that politeness which every gentleman is indispensably bound to, must vary his behaviour, according to the ranks, ages, sexes, &c. The breach of this rule is a source of great extravagancies. It is not only meant, that our discourse and behaviour should be suited

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to those we converse with ; but also that it be becoming of ourselves.

XIII.

The familiarity that is contracted in friendships of the greatest intimacy, and the longest standing, will not dispense with the observance of politeness ; and the freedom allowed of between friends ought always to be accompanied with a proper respect, especially in the presence of others. As there is no real friendship without esteem, friends should be as careful to express their esteem for each other, as their friendship. There have been many instances of friendships intirely broken off, or, at least, considerably cooled, on account that the parties, under a pretence of treating one another freely and without ceremony, have slid insensibly into rudeness and ill manners.

The great occasion of all, that calls for politeness with our friend, is, when there is a necessity for telling him some useful truth, that is disagreeable in itself, and to admonish him of his faults and weaknesses. This is one of the duties of friendship, and it is politeness only, that can enable us to perform it successfully. That will teach a man the art of reproving without mortifying, and even mortifying without giving offence.

XIV. As

XIV.

As the strongest passion in human nature is that which we have for being esteemed and regarded, politeness more especially consists in giving proofs of our consideration for the persons we converse with, in managing and even flattering their vanity. Vanity is the source, and the seasoning, of our greatest pleasures.

A perpetual sacrifice of our own vanity, to that of other people, is the best definition that can be given of politeness.

When I talk of flattering the vanity of others, I do not mean in the way of servile flattery and adulation. These are words that are always taken in a bad sense. It is essential to flattery to praise falsely, whereas a person may be said to flatter, in giving the justest praises. The word *flatter* frequently signifies no more than to please; to speak and act with the view of being agreeable. A person is said to have a flattering way with him, meaning no more than a winning and insinuating one. It is never allowable to bestow praise improperly, not only because it may be a means of inspiring the persons that receive it with pride, but also, because it is never allowable to speak contrary to truth. On the other hand, one may, and even ought frequently to give a person his just praises, though it should have this effect upon him. In a word, one may flatter the vanity of others, without being guilty of what

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what is properly flattery and adulation. For instance, when we make use of a compliment to introduce a piece of friendly advice, or a seasonable reproof ; or when by drawing the conversation to any particular subject, or by artfully throwing in a contradiction, you give others an opportunity of shining, and displaying their parts ; may not this be said to flatter their vanity ? The expression, I think, is not at all too strong ; and, rightly understood, carries nothing in it that is offensive to good morals.

Indeed, when we cannot please in conversation, without having recourse to disguise and falsehood, we must then give up the design. When truth and politeness interfere with each other, and are not to be reconciled, politeness must always be sacrificed to truth.

XV.

It is not sufficient, that a person forbears doing and saying every thing, that may be disagreeable to other people ; but he must also bear with any thing they may say or do, that is offensive or ill-mannered to himself : so that a great part of good breeding consists in bearing with bad, and giving no other reproof to it but that of a contrary behaviour.

To give others to understand, that they offend us, is generally a pretty sure way to offend them.

The

The difficulty of being polite is just as great, as the number is small of those who are so.

XVI.

It is of use to be sometimes with people that are not polite. The disgust you take at their behaviour, and the observation you make of their faults, secure you from falling into them. Besides, nothing is more proper to confirm us in politeness, than the necessity we are under of practising it with persons that are deficient in it. Those that are polite themselves, are of use to us by their example; but those who are not so, furnish us with a variety of occasions, where it is difficult to be so. And frequent occasions of acting do more toward overcoming a difficulty, than mere examples. If politeness is to be learnt thoroughly by practice only, which way shall a person learn that part of it, which consists in bearing unpoliteness, without conversing with people of this character? Let us suppose a young man, that has never conversed with any but polite people, and consequently has never received any affront from ill-breeding. His friends may have told him, without doubt, that he can never have any sufficient reason for departing from the rules of politeness; that they are to be kept even with those who break them with us; and that another man's misbehaviour will by no means justify ours. Fine lessons, in truth; but of little use to

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him under the first incivility that is offered him! The more polite he is himself, the more will he be shocked with the affront; and, by that means, in the greater danger of violating his politeness. But a proper acquaintance with the world, where he will meet with but too many instances of the same kind, will quickly give him a more firm and robust politeness; a politeness capable of maintaining itself against the insults of ill-breeding itself. Politeness, like all other virtues, is to be brought to its full perfection, only by surmounting difficulties.

XVII.

The company of the ladies, it is commonly said, is the best school for politeness; and it is true: but, however, not so much for the improvement we receive from them, in the way of example, as from the necessity we are under of behaving with a great deal of politeness before them, in order to be thought barely tolerable by them. The most essential merit a man can have, with women of sense, is a large share of politeness. There are women that have lovers without sense or politeness, or one single good quality; but there are none that will make an acquaintance of a person, even of the greatest worth, and the finest understanding, if he wants that agreeable address, that genteel and easy behaviour, which distinguish the well-bred man.

The

The advantage a person reaps from frequent conversation with the ladies, in regard to politeness, is pretty much of the same kind with that of frequenting people of quality. The women in *Europe*, and especially in *France*, are the quality in respect of the men, even of those who are their superiors. But the politeness we practise with great folks, is frequently no more than a matter of mere decency, a forced behaviour, in which the heart has no share, and which costs us a great sacrifice of our inclinations; whereas the observance we pay to the ladies is a voluntary homage, the most sincere that can be. There is as great a pleasure in showing them respect, as they take in receiving it. And, therefore, they make the best masters for men in the affair of politeness, because they are the most severe, and, at the same time, the best beloved of any.

Merit may be distinguished into three sorts; the esteemable, the amiable, and the agreeable. The merit we esteem lies in a superiority of genius and understanding, joined with perfect probity and honour. The amiable kind is seated in the heart, and consists in a sweetness of manners, an evenness of temper, and, above all, in a polite behaviour. The agreeable merit is a turn for gaiety, and a faculty of communicating it to other people.

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XVIII.

An excess of boldness, or of bashfulness, is equally contrary to true politeness, which requires, that we talk and act equally with an air of modesty, and an air of freedom.

Bashfulness is seldom to be cured by mere advice, and still less by railery and reproaches. The use of company and the world is the only cure for it; and even this will not entirely conquer it in some people. The least thing in the world disconcerts them. They can neither talk nor behave with any freedom, but among their particular friends; and that constraint and perplexity, with which they appear in company, is apt to give people a very low opinion of their understanding.

It is not best to seem to give too much attention to a bashful person. This sets him more at his ease: and his spirits should be raised now-and-then, by saying some short and moderate thing to his advantage (Persons of this sort would very often be agreeable company, if they could but flatter themselves it was in their power to be so); but too strong compliments only serve to confound them the more.

Bashfulness has all the appearance of modesty, but it is frequently no more than an appearance. It does not always imply a freedom from pride or self-conceit, and least of all from vanity. I have known bashful people, that were astonished at them-
selves

selves for being so ; because they knew very well, they said, that they did not want sense, and were no worse furnished with the means of being agreeable, than other people. There are, therefore, bashful people, that have a very good conceit of themselves. When they are alone, they raise themselves with a reflection upon their merit and endowments, whatever they think them ; and, upon the strength of these, they imagine, they shall face company the next time with proper assurance, and deliver themselves in conversation with due freedom ; but no sooner have they tried the experiment again, than their old confusion and perplexity return upon them as bad as ever.

Others, and, indeed, the greatest number of them, have more vanity than self-conceit. They are bashful for no other reason, but because they are too desirous to please, and too apprehensive of the opinion people may entertain of them. They never talk but with trembling. They are afraid they shall expose themselves by what they are saying, and make themselves ridiculous to the company.

Self-conceit produces contempt of others, and, of consequence, a failure of the respect that is due to them. The want of a just confidence in one's self occasions a foolish shamefacedness, and ridiculous perplexity : so that one ought to have a good opinion of

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other people, and not too bad a one of one's self.

XIX.

There is a politeness in surrendering yourself, if I may say so, with a good grace in conversation ; in having no better sense than the rest of your company ; in not affecting too much exactness in what you say ; in leaving room, now-and-then, for a contradiction, or an objection ; in a word, in taking care not to be always in the right.

I knew a person who talked very well, but never said any thing without having the soul draught of it first in his head ; for which reason he talked but little in company. Premeditation runs away with all the time ; and you lose the season for what you have to say, before you are prepared to say it. By this means, a man is always vexed himself, and troublesome to other people. This is all pride and vanity, and, of consequence, want of politeness. For politeness, it must be remembered, consists in the art of concealing our own vanity, and flattering that of other people. But you can never flatter a man more successfully, than by giving him an opportunity of opposing you with advantage, of thinking himself better master of the point than yourself, and of seeing, that you are forced to give it up to his arguments. The greater share of sense a man has, the more he is obliged to this sort of politeness, and the more he flatters

flatters the vanity of the persons he condescends to.

We are too much afraid of being despised, and not enough of being hated. We discover in this the badness of our hearts. But we act too, at the same time, against our true interest; for it is of much more importance to us to be beloved, than esteemed. Friendship is a source of the most solid advantages we can draw from a commerce with other men. It is not the persons we esteem, that we are fondest of serving, but those we love. A mere esteem is not the principle of friendship and beneficence.





O F

The N A T U R A L.



Say the *natural*, as we say the *sublime*. I shall explain my title by justifying it.

I.

To write naturally, is to write in such a way as may seem to have cost the writer no pains.

It is only upon reflection, that we judge a fine performance, written in a natural style, must have cost the composer some labour. We know by experience, and the confession of the best writers, that a work of any considerable goodness must be the effect of application ; that it is impossible every thing should present itself at once to the mind, in the point of perfection that is necessary for its appearing before a judicious reader ; and that when a person of the greatest and the readiest genius writes every thing that offers to his imagination, and in the same form that

that it offers, his work is a mixture of good and bad things, and of things well and ill expressed. Indeed, one sometimes meets, all at once, with the best thought upon a subject, and the best manner of expressing it ; but the contrary to this is much more frequently the case.

II.

The thoughts that are most suitable to a subject, and the expression that is most suitable to those thoughts, give a natural air to a discourse. Nothing seems easier to have been found, than the thoughts that are most proper ; and the expression that is justest seems to be the first that could have offered.

It is a consequence of this principle, that the order and connexion of thoughts with one another make a discourse natural. It is not enough, that all the thoughts you make use of are proper to your subject ; but they must also agree with one another ; each thought must introduce and usher in the next, so that the reader may be led on smoothly, without straining his attention for the connexion.

The omission of that which the reader may easily supply, will not hinder a discourse from appearing natural and flowing ; because it is natural enough to retrench what is easily supplied. On the other hand, it would be a sort of affectation to proceed,
upon

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upon all subjects, in a geometrical manner, by a chain of ideas immediately linked with one another. Besides, the suppression of that, which, as it were, supplies itself, makes a discourse more rapid and lively, and, of course, more natural. A consequence may stand at a distance from its principle, and, nevertheless, appear natural, when the other consequences, that connect them together, are obvious. A writer must make as fast as he can to his point, and without taking any notice of every little step in the way. The mind delights to perceive several things at a glance, provided it can be done easily. But what is easy to one, is not so to another. That which is but a step for a giant, is a leap for a dwarf. Thus, a discourse, that shall appear very natural and clear to some readers, shall not be so to others of less penetration.

In general, that which requires a good deal of application to be perfectly understood, that which seems obscure rather from the style than the things themselves, does not appear natural; at least, the first time of reading it. That which we read with labour, seems to us to have been composed with pain. That which we understand with difficulty, we think was not written without. But then it often happens, that we think a thing very natural, upon a second reading, which we thought otherwise of at first.

III.

A person may write with ease to himself, and yet not very naturally. Much practice, joined to a particular turn of mind, may make easy to some people a way of writing that is not natural, and which would be very difficult, or even impossible, to others. It is so true, that the natural, in its original meaning, and according to the most common acceptation of the word, is the easy, or that which seems so, that when any one appears to write with ease, even in a style that is not natural, we say it is natural to him.

IV.

A style may be singular, and yet natural at the same time. It may not have the least resemblance to any other style we are acquainted with; nor may we, perhaps, be apt to think we should imitate it easily; and yet there may be something natural, simple, and easy in it: such, in my opinion, is the style of *Fontenelle*.

V.

Common conversation, even that of the lower sort of people, abounds with a number of very happy expressions, which, from the mouths of their authors, have passed insensibly into all others. By hearing them constantly, we understand them without reflection. They do not strike us in the least, nor do we dream of their having any
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wit in them. Yet some of these expressions are so ingenious, that we should think them quaint and affected, if they were new ; and I do not doubt but they were thought so at their first appearance. Habit makes that seem natural, which, at first, we might think too refined ; and, in time, we frequently come to look upon it even as flat and insipid.

VI.

Negligencies give a natural air to writing, by discharging it of an air of labour and stiffness ; and it is in this sense that they are sometimes reckoned among the graces of style. They set off a piece, not by themselves, and as they are beauties ; for, on the contrary, they are, at least, a lesser kind of faults ; but because they are looked upon as indications, that a work has not been much laboured. And that it is intirely upon this account, that they please us, it may be observed, that they have a different effect upon us, when we meet with them in a work that seems in general to have been studied ; for, in that case, they cannot persuade us, that the piece was written with ease, because the main of it gives us a different impression of it. Instead of making us think, that an author has not laboured much in the production of it, they only shew, that he has not laboured equally throughout ; that he has not taken the pains to correct his faults, or, perhaps, that he did not see them. But this

this is an impression to his disadvantage ; and therefore it may be said, that negligencies discredit a work which has otherwise an air of labour, or ought, indeed, to be laboured.

We are sometimes well pleased, as M. *Pascal* says, to find a man, where we expected an author. And sometimes, too, we could be glad to find an author, and not a man.

But it is said, That negligencies set off beauties, and shew them in a stronger light, and are in a work what shades are in a picture.

I answer, That it is not always true, that a beauty, preceded or followed by a fault, appears to more advantage for it ; for I am speaking only of such negligencies as would be faults, and not merely of such turns and expressions as are of a more simple and familiar kind. So far is every thing from being a fault, that is not quite brilliant, that it is not always a negligence, and very frequently a beauty.

I say, therefore, that there needs but one of these negligencies, that are faults, to spoil a fine passage in a work ; and a certain number of negligent passages in a work, to diminish the value of it considerably, or even to spoil the whole to such a degree, as that the beauties of it shall be intirely lost. Whatever pleasure particular passages in a work may have given you, you are not fond
of

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of reading it again, if other passages in the same work, to as great a number, have considerably disgusted you. The works that succeed best, or, at least, have the most constant and lasting success, are not such as have most beauties in them ; but those that have fewest faults. Taking the whole of a work together, they are the latter sort that give us most pleasure. Inequality is a great fault in works of entertainment. We love to have our pleasures pure, and we often prefer such as are so, to the very greatest, mixed with pain. This is more especially true, with regard to the pleasure of reading, when we read only for our pleasure. There is scarce any pleasure, in which a mixture of things that disgust us, is more sensibly felt.

Homer and *Virgil* among the antients, and *Corneille* and *Racine* among the moderns, are a great instance of what I am saying. But to mention only the two latter, all the critics agree, that the beauties of *Corneille* are a good deal above those of *Racine* ; but the latter is more equal, and has fewer faults : so that *Corneille* is in most repute with the men of judgment, and *Racine* most to the taste of the public. There are, without doubt, other reasons of this preference, which is commonly given to *Racine* above *Corneille* ; but this is one of the principal ones.

Though it were true, that a beauty, preceded by a fault, would appear to the greater ad-

advantage ; yet what is gained on one side is lost on the other : for a fault, preceded by a beauty, would appear just so much the worse for it ; but, in reality, there is more lost than is got by such a mixture. We discover more readily, as I have before observed, and receive a stronger impression from faults than beauties : besides, the faults we meet with in a work, lower our opinion of the author, and, by that means, the pleasure we take in reading his performance. We conceive a good opinion of an author, when his work gives us pleasure ; and this good opinion, again, heightens the pleasure which his work gives us.

The comparison so frequently brought in, upon this occasion, of shades in a picture, can never serve to justify the negligences of writers : for shades are not properly negligences in painting, but obscure or fainter colours, which have their beauty, as well as any of the rest. They are the darker parts of a picture, and serve to heighten the lustre of those which were intended to appear in the strongest light. These they embellish, and are embellished by them in their turn. This comparison, therefore, proves nothing but the necessity of variety in a style. There can never be too many beauties in a work intended to please ; but there may be too many beauties of one sort. Too uniform a style, how fine soever it be, is always tedious. And this, for instance,

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stance, is the fault of M. *Flecbier's* style. It would be more agreeable, if it had more variety in it. The antithesis prevails too much in it, and recurs too often. Besides, this, of all figures, is that which requires the most art and pains to manage it; and, consequently, is capable of giving an unnatural turn to a piece, where it occurs too frequently.

VII.

The natural is an excellence and a perfection in style, no further than the other qualities of a good style accompany it. So that when it is said, that a style ought to be natural; it is not to be understood as if a style was good, merely because it is natural; but only, that it is a bad one, or, at least, not so good as it should be, when it is not natural.

There are several authors, that write very naturally, and yet very ill, in a flat and insipid style. Others write not naturally, and ill, in a style that is quaint and forced, without being ingenious. They would be glad to be natural, but they cannot effect it. They are not above common turns and expressions, if they knew but how to find them. Every thing is hard to express with them, even the plainest and most common things. And, lastly, some authors write very well in all respects, but that their style is not natural and simple enough. It is not said, however, upon this account, that they are

are bad writers ; at least, it ought not to be said.

The fault of not being natural proceeds sometimes from want of genius, and sometimes from want of taste.

VIII.

Let us see, now, the reasons of that pleasure, which a natural style gives us. I have already hinted them, by shewing, wherein they consist ; but it may be proper to point them out more distinctly.

A work written naturally, in point of thought and style, pleases us, because we read it without trouble or hesitation. It does not require too much application of us,

IX.

The fine things that have been produced without much study, please us likewise by means of the good opinion they give us of the author. It is true, indeed, this makes no difference in the things themselves ; nor are they the better, or the worse, for the greater or less application that has been bestowed upon them. But though this is true, with respect to his works, yet our opinion of the author depends both upon the goodness of the productions, and the ease with which he produced them. And our opinion of an author raises that we have of his work. But some people will say, What does it signify, whether a book has cost its author
Y much

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much study or little? It is a circumstance foreign to the book itself. All that concerns a reader is, whether it be good or not. This is true; but this will not alter either the impression we receive from a work, or the judgment we make of it in consequence of that impression. There are several collections of letters, memoirs, and pieces of poetry, that would not give us so much pleasure as they do, but as we know they were produced at a heat. It is with reason that we think the better of the authors upon this account. Though their performances may be very imperfect, yet it must have required some genius to produce them with so much ease; but it is a mere prejudice to think the better of works for the sake of the authors.

And, perhaps, too, if it is rightly considered, it may be as great a one to think the better, or the worse, of an author, for the greater or less ease he composes with; and that the proverb, which says, *Soon enough, if well enough*, is as applicable to authors, as it is to their writings. Great facility in composing does not always imply a deeper and more solid genius, but only a greater share of fire and vivacity; and is not, properly speaking, so much a perfection, as an advantage. Two authors, equally good, are equally to be esteemed. He that composes with the most ease, is only the most uncommon person. But I am too much interested in the question myself, to determine it.

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X.

It is no excuse for a sorry performance; to say, that it cost the author but little pains, if he really ought to have taken a great deal about it. On the contrary, we like it so much the worse, on account of the resentment we conceive against an author for his carelessness. It argues a contempt of the public, to present it with the fruits of hurry and negligence; and the affront which a reader thinks is offered him in this way, disgusts him, and gives him an unfavourable opinion of a performance. This holds good, more particularly of pieces for the stage, and speeches upon public and solemn occasions. He who publishes, does in some sort invite all the world to be his readers; but he who brings a piece upon the stage, or pronounces a public oration, gives an invitation the most express of all others. But it is a great indignity to invite the public, without making the best preparation that is possible for their reception. There are occasions, when it is allowable to treat our friends without ceremony, and give them what we have at hand; as there are others, that require a formal entertainment.

XI.

It would certainly prejudice a reader against a performance, to be told, that the author had spent but little time and pains about it; because things of this sort are

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commonly good for little. Indeed, such a prepossession as this may sometimes serve to heighten our pleasure ; because good things make just so much the more impression upon us, as we had little expectation of meeting with them ; but, for the most part, it diminishes it, and that which is good is apt to appear bad, if we expected to find it so. For the same reason, it would almost always happen, that we should come to like a work the less, if we were told, even after reading it, that it had cost the author but little study. Prejudice, in this case, would have a kind of retrospective effect ; we should be apt to look upon ourselves as too much slighted, and think we had taken the performance for better than it really was. In short, we should always think an author had been to blame, for not bestowing more application upon it than he had ; because he might probably have made it still more perfect. There are sometimes, indeed, smaller pieces, that are excellent, though the productions of an instant ; and yet it is seldom but even these are capable of improvement.

XII.

But further ; the natural pleases us, as it carries an air of modesty in it, whereas affectation has an air of vanity. It is taken for granted, that the generality of authors, especially those who write in the entertaining way, have pure vanity for their motive :
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but if it is so, we do not care, however, they should discover too much of it in their works, or appear to have had any other view, but the instruction or amusement of their readers.

All authors are desirous of passing for men of understanding; and those who write with affectation, would pass for persons of uncommon genius, for *beaux esprits*: and this vanity is more disgusting than the other. There is nobody but thinks he has his share of sense and understanding; but every-body does not think he has this finer sort of it, which denominates a person a *bel esprit*; and whatever contempt may be affixed to this quality, there is scarce any one we are more ambitious of.

XIII.

If a fondness for shewing wit in his writings is sometimes the occasion of a person's finding many beautiful thoughts, and happy expressions; it also helps him to many, that are false and improper. When an author is in quest of the brilliant, it too often happens, that he prefers it to the solid, mixes low points and turns with strokes really ingenious, passes from the fine to the tinsel, from the real beauty to that which is only the appearance of it; and this was, in reality, the case with several of our best writers, before the reign of *Lewis XIV.*

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Some persons seem to be afraid at this time, lest we should relapse insensibly into this bad taste again ; and, indeed, it must be owned, that the taste of our age is not so very different from that of the past. The good works, that appear now, are, perhaps, not so simple, and, if it can well be, have more of the brilliant than those of *Moliere, Fontaine, Racine*, &c. Even those that most recommend the antient simplicity, give into the brilliant, the moderns as well as their predecessors. But it must be owned, at the same time, that the value of justness was never better known, than it is now ; that we were never more severe in the choice of our thoughts, more inveterate against the false, more attached to the true, more capable of distinguishing the false, under the most specious disguise ; in a word, more hard to be pleased in matters of wit ; and, lastly, that we have not any more solid and judicious works, than those of some late authors, who have been charged with affectation, and a passion for shining. And I should not scruple to say, that a conjunction of wit and judgment is the proper character of this age.

XIV.

Works that have a serious end in view, as the enforcing some truth of importance, cannot be too simple and natural, and ought not, by any means, to be too much embellished ; because an excess of wit is apt to
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create a suspicion of either speaker or author. A person never convinces to any purpose, that leaves room to doubt, whether it was really so much his aim to convince, as to display his parts. And by leaving it in doubt, whether he intended to convince other people, he brings it in question, whether he be really persuaded himself. But, in order to work upon others, it is necessary, that a person is fully persuaded himself of the truth he is delivering; and, to this purpose, nothing will suffice, but that he really is so; because it is the hardest of all things to counterfeit a conviction.

If an author had to do only with reasonable people, there would be no occasion to seem persuaded himself, in order to persuade them; it would be enough to give them good reasons for the truth he was enforcing. But the generality of men being scarce capable of distinguishing between good reasons and bad, it is very natural for them to entertain a suspicion of such arguments as do not persuade the person that uses them, and to suspect them, in proportion as they are proposed with more wit and ingenuity. For the greater abilities the person who offers them has, the more probable it is, that what he believes is true, and that what he does not believe is false. If, therefore, there be reason to believe, that he is not persuaded of what he says, the stronger and more convincing his reasons appear, by the

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light in which he places them, and the advantage he gives them by his manner of recommending them, the more likely are his hearers or readers to think them false.

We are mechanically disposed to receive an impression from sentiments with which others are affected; and this disposition is so strong in the generality of men, that it is almost an infallible method to persuade them of any thing, be it what it will, to appear well persuaded one's self. The bulk of mankind are not so much to be led right by good arguments, or seduced by sophistry, as they are carried away by strong and forcible impressions.

Too much wit is a hindrance to conviction and persuasion, as it turns the attention from the things themselves, to the manner in which they are expressed: not that it is essential to the effectual conveyance of truth, that it should not be expressed in an agreeable manner; but then it is the heart that it must be made agreeable to, rather than the imagination; and the heart is only to be pleased by moving its affections. In works of persuasion, it is with the style as with water: the best is that which has no taste; that which does not of itself engage the attention of the auditor or reader, but fixes it wholly upon the subject. An orator never excels so much as when he makes an impression upon his hearers, by his manner of saying things; and yet the hearer himself
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imputes this effect to the things themselves, and fancies that they would have the same effect, let them have been expressed how they would.

But this rule of not shewing too much wit belongs likewise to works of pure entertainment, which are designed to interest and affect us; as, for instance, in tragedies. It belongs also to histories, and works of the narrative kind, where readers look chiefly for facts; and, in short, it respects all sorts of performances, where there are personages introduced, and where an author does not speak in his own name. As such personages are supposed to speak, for the most part, off-hand, it would be against probability to make them talk with too much wit, or, at least, with that kind of it, that favours of study and premeditation.

But there are other sorts of works, in which there is little else expected, besides the pleasure we receive from an ingenious way of saying things. Such are, academical discourses, compliments, eulogies, &c. In the same class I put such works as are, indeed, meant to instruct, but upon subjects that the generality of readers will not be instructed upon, unless they are entertained at the same time; of this sort is poetry. Works of this kind cannot be too elegant and ornamental, provided, however, they are but solid at the same time.

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It seems to me, therefore, that those who condemn a work of this kind, for instance, *Bruyere's* characters, by saying, that it has too much wit and ingenuity in it, do not express themselves with any exactness. For, what is a work full of wit? It is one that abounds with such thoughts and expressions as are new, fine, delicate, and sublime. But the more there are of such sort of thoughts and expressions, in a work of the nature of *M. Bruyere*, the more perfect it is, the more agreeable to those who have themselves a good deal of genius. I own, it fatigues those who have less; but, as I have said elsewhere, it fatigues them only because they are weak. They require more application than others, in order thoroughly to relish all the beauties of it, and this application tires them: but a performance is not the worse for being above their capacity. On the contrary, it is a proof of its excellence. Is it a fault in the sun to diffuse a strong light, because there are some people that have weak eyes, and are not able to bear it?

XV.

I would not say, with *M. Boileau*, that the most natural works are commonly those that have been laboured with most care. Reason and experience, and particularly the poetry of *M. Boileau* himself, are a proof to the contrary. It is certain, however, that a work intended for the press, cannot
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be too much laboured : if it should, by that means, be not quite so natural, yet it will be more exact and correct ; and it is this which a reader principally requires.

The rule of writing naturally; though it be a general rule, more particularly respects some sorts of works, than others, as, for instance, letters. Those of *Madam de Sevigné* would not be so beautiful as they are, I mean, in the view of letters, had they been more laboured. It would be a dangerous thing to meddle with them, or try to correct their negligences. And so *Madam Sevigné* advised *Madam de Grignan* her daughter, to avoid all study in her letters, to write quick, and never think of making them fine compositions. The reason is, that, in the first place, it is essential to the style of letters, that it be extremely natural ; and, in the next, that it is an unavoidable effect of study and labour, more or less, to make things otherwise. This last assertion, perhaps, may offend some people, tho', I believe, it must be thought exactly true by such as rightly understand it. The proof, drawn from the style of letters, is without reply. Letters that are laboured, will never be good ones. They may be fine pieces, ingenious performances, and much to be valued : but they will never be true letters ; letters, valuable as such, and fit for models in their way ; because, when they are laboured, they will no longer
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be so natural, as letters ought to be. But the case is not the same with works of wit, as with letters. The natural is not so essential to the generality of such works, as solidity, justness, and exactness; and if labour may deprive them of some beauties, yet it is that only that can repair the loss, by giving them those other grand qualifications, in which their excellence principally consists.

And from hence, now, I may answer an objection, which may be made to what I have asserted. There are, it will be said, performances that are very natural, and yet very much laboured; for instance, *Racine's* tragedies; therefore, it cannot be said, that it is the effect of labour to take away the natural air. I answer, that the degree of the natural, necessary in one kind of work, is not the same that is necessary in another. So that a work is called natural, when it is as much so as it ought to be, though it be less so than some other work of another kind. For instance, *Racine* is not so natural as *M. Sevigné*: but he is natural enough for the kind in which he has written, and, if he was more so, he would be too much. For which reason it is said, speaking at large, and without any restriction, that *Racine* is very natural, and even that he is as natural as *Madam Sevigné*; but it is only meant, that he is so in proportion to the nature of his work. Study would have taken from *Madam Sevigné's* letters that natural
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air, which so charms us in them ; and it has given to *Racine's* tragedies that correctness and elegance, which are some of their principal excellencies. If *Racine's* style, in his tragedies, had been no more studied, than that of *Madam Sevigné* in her letters, it would have seemed weak and negligent ; and if *Madam Sevigné's* style was as much laboured as *Racine's*, it would appear stiff and affected.

XVI.

Persons that have a good deal of vivacity, and such as do not study, talk and write commonly in a more easy and natural manner, than those of a slower and more solid genius, and such as profess literature. Women, for instance, talk and write more naturally than men. The reason is, that the latter, having less facility, are obliged to more labour in speaking ; and, being conversant with books, they confine themselves more to follow the rules of art.

XVII.

It may be true of some particular passages in a work, that they are made more natural by study ; but it is seldom true of an intire work.

It would therefore be but a poor refutation of those writers, who allege, in excuse for their indolence, that their writings would not have been so natural as they are, had they laboured them any more ; I say,
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it would be but a poor answer to them, to tell them, that study and correction are so far from taking away the easy and natural air from writing, that they are the only things to give it. For, certainly, it is not to make his performance more natural, that an author reviews it perpetually, and employs his file again and again upon it ; but it is to give it more justness, more method, more precision ; which is a thing that is commonly to be effected by pains only. But if a work is not natural, when it comes first out of its author's hands, it never will be, tho' he should labour it all his life-time. The answer I should rather chuse to give these indolent authors, that never revise what they have done, and think they have finished, when they have written the last line ; I say, the answer I should rather chuse to make to them should be this ; That the inconvenience they apprehend from appearing less natural, is a very small one, in comparison of other advantages, which they may procure to their writings, by labouring and correcting them with all the care they are capable of ; and besides, that a work, intended for the press, is always natural enough, let it be ever so much laboured, when the composer is of that natural taste, and turn of mind, which lead a person to think and express himself in a just and natural manner.

It will be objected, perhaps, that it follows, from what I have been saying, that a work composed in haste, and, as it were, off-hand, ought always to appear natural, which is contrary to experience. The answer is easy. A work of this hasty kind shall sometimes, indeed, appear a good deal less natural than another, that is, very much laboured, but composed by an author who is a friend to the simple and natural beauties, and an enemy to all affectation. When a reader of the ordinary sort reads works in the taste of *Lucan* and *Seneca*, he imagines, that a style so affected must be the fruit of great labour; whereas a proper judge in these things knows very well, that such thoughts and expressions, as nobody else would find without difficulty, cost nothing to some sort of writers; and that it would be even difficult for them, to think and express themselves otherwise. But an author of this character would make his work still less natural, by employing more labour upon it; because the more he laboured it, the more he would give it of those turns he is fond of, and the less he would leave in it of that simplicity and negligence, which, in spite of the singularity that runs thro' the main of his performance, would shew that it had not been much laboured.

Sometimes it happens, that an author, who is very affected in his writings, appears natural and unaffected enough in conversation;

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tion ; but we are not always obliged to him for this, nor are we to look upon it as a merit in him. The truth is, he is not able, in off-hand discourse, to find those turns, which make the style of his books unnatural. He would be glad to talk as he writes ; but, as luck will have it, it is not in his power.

I agree, that an author, who, by a particular turn of genius, or long habit, has acquired a way of writing, that is not natural, and yet to him is easy, would not be able, without great pains, to succeed in writing naturally. But the reason is, that he must go against the whole bent of his genius, and renounce his natural taste to attempt it : so that, when I say, the more an author of this kind laboured his work, the less natural it would be, I say it upon the supposition, that he laboured it with a view of making it as perfect as possible, conformably to his own idea of perfection.

Some authors, that do not write so naturally as they should, fall into this fault only through their being too anxious to write well. This they would do, if they would but content themselves with the first thoughts and expressions that occur to them. By aiming at perfection, they fail of doing tolerably.

A person of exact taste cannot labour his performances too much : for such a one will always be able to make a good choice

among his ideas ; and, if the second are not so good as the first, he will return to the first again. But there are others, who find it easy enough to produce good thoughts, and yet, having no other way to judge of their goodness, but by the pains they stood them in, commonly make choice of the most indifferent. There is no other advice to be given such persons, but to put themselves under an impossibility of making a wrong choice, by confining themselves to their first ideas, and not to make too much use of their invention, for fear of distracting their judgment.

An author of a very copious and a very lively genius, communicating to one of his friends the design of a work he was projecting, laid before him all the materials he had collected for that purpose. There were three or four general plans, each different from all the other ; an infinite number of thoughts, which it was apparently impossible to bring all into his piece, which was intended to be but of small compass ; and, last of all, several forms of expressing each particular thought in it. In truth, says his friend, after having heard him quite through to the end, without interruption, I pity you your abundance. You will find it no easy matter to make your choice out of it. Your imagination has cut out work enough of conscience for your judgment.

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XVIII.

The rule is good, and reasonable in itself, which says, We should not stop at well, but do still better than well, if we can : yet in practice it is subject to several inconveniences. The good and the bad in every thing are neighbours. The best is the very next door to the worst. There is but a single step from the one to the other. The *Italian* proverb is well known, *That best is an enemy to good* ; and, indeed, it is the most dangerous enemy it has. This is true, with regard to works of genius, as well as in the case of happiness.

XIX.

The equivocal use of words is frequently a source of disputes, even amongst the men of wit and genius. I have heard it debated which was the most natural writer, *Corneille*, or *Racine*. One side maintained the former, the other the latter, and both were right in different respects. *Corneille* is more natural than *Racine* in one sense, *viz.* as he is less studied and laboured, and more careless and unaffected. He is more solicitous about his thought, than his expression ; more attentive to the matter, than the style ; and the whole of his work, than particular parts of it. His aim is to do well, rather than to please. He follows his genius, without striving to accommodate it to the taste of the public, and courting the bulk of an

audience. On the other hand, *Racine* is more natural than *Corneille* in this sense, that he is more equal and uniform, nowhere forced or extravagant, employs commonly the most proper expression, scarce ever gives into puns or fustian, and is more to the level of all capacities than *Corneille*. The latter frequently thinks, and expresses himself, in a manner that has something bold, daring, and turbulent in it. *Racine* is always elegant, correct, and orderly. And so, an author, that was not so brilliant and so singular as the first, nor so exact and correct as the latter, would appear more natural than either. Such, for instance, is *Homer*.

However, if the question must be decided between our two *French* poets, I should follow the common opinion, and give it in favour of *Racine*. He is more natural than *Corneille*, to take this word in its common signification. It is certain, the false brilliant, affected antithesis, and extravagant hyperbole, are but too common in the first pieces of *Corneille*; whereas those of *Racine* are all writ with a correctness, and a regularity, from which he scarce ever departs afterwards: so that it may further likewise be said, that, when *Corneille* deviates from the natural, he does it a great deal more, and in a more vicious way, than *Racine*. Sometimes, again, he is too natural, and falls by turns into the two extremes of fustian and

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flatness. But, to make amends for this, his works afford us the finest instances of those admirable touches, in which the great and the simple, the natural and noble, are united. The reader may easily recollect several passages of this kind, which have a force and sublimity in them, far exceeding any thing of *Racine's*.

But to conclude, with throwing all the light we can upon this matter ; let us observe an instance or two more, of the different senses of the word *natural*. It is universally agreed, that *Boileau's* poetry is not so natural as *Racine's*, not so harmonious, so easy, so flowing ; for nobody pretends that it is affected, or that we meet with puns or low turns, or even an excess of wit in it. We find traces of great labour in it, but no affectation.

M. *Bossuet's* style, admirable as it is on account of that force and sublimity, which are the distinguishing marks of it, has yet, every now-and-then, somewhat harsh, strained, and embarrassed in it.

M. *Flecbier* has always been accused of affectation, of too laboured a justness and elegance.

The archbishop of *Cambray* is equally free from both these faults. His style, at the same time that it is splendid, delicate, and majestic, is nevertheless free, easy, and pleasant. It is pity, indeed, that it is sometimes a little too diffuse.

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And this, undoubtedly, may suffice to put the reader in a capacity of applying my principles to the good authors antient and modern, and of knowing distinctly, what before, perhaps, he had but a confused notion of ; I mean, why it is, that the natural pleases us, in what it consists, and in how many several ways, all more or less vicious, a person may depart from it.





O F
P A R T S.

I.



HERE is no man but what has parts, and is capable of something. And there is no man whose parts are universal, and who is capable of every thing. This ought to inspire one part of mankind with modesty, and the other with confidence and courage.

II.

There are more persons, who, for want of education, or of opportunities to exercise their talents, or even through indolence, fall short of what they might have been, than there are of persons, who, fancying themselves more considerable than they are, thrust themselves into places and things, of which they are not capable.

III.

I am in doubt, whether it be so true as it is commonly thought to be, that a real
genius

genius surmounts all disadvantages of birth, fortune, and education ; and that a person born with a considerable genius for poetry, painting, &c. will always make a great poet, painter, &c. It must be allowed, there are several instances, that appear to favour this opinion : these are much talked of, and in every body's mouth. But we do not know what instances there are on the other side : if we did, we should, perhaps, find they were the greatest number.

If any considerable share of genius is so rare a thing, it is because all who were born to it have it not. The words of Scripture seem applicable to this matter, That many are called, but few are chosen.

It is with talents, as with gold, and precious stones : we enjoy but a small part of what really exists. The greatest part, undiscovered even by the possessors themselves, lies buried in obscure persons, like diamonds in unknown mines.

IV.

I say, in one company, That M. N*** is a man of parts ; and in another, That he is not ; and this without being guilty of the least contradiction or falsehood, or deceiving the persons I speak to : on the contrary, I should deceive them, if I talked otherwise. They have not both of them the same idea of a man of parts. They use the expression in very different senses. I must therefore adapt

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myself to their respective dictionaries, if I would be understood by them.

Perhaps there may not be any great difference in their general notion of parts, and the nature of those qualities which make a man of parts; but they are not agreed upon the degree in which a person must possess these qualities, in order to have a right to this character. The one require more, the other less, according to the share they themselves, or the persons they converse with, are endued with. It is by being acquainted with the best things, that we come to despise moderate ones, and we judge of both but by comparison. All magnitudes are relative, intellectual as well as corporeal.

V.

The persons least capable of instruction, are those who have, at the same time, but mean parts, and great vivacity. Your cold, heavy sort of fools, persons we call stupid, are much more capable of application. They hear, at least, what is said to them, and make some reflections upon it afterwards, according to their capacities; and so, by degrees, lay up a stock of knowledge, and a set of principles, which serve them to regulate their judgment by on all occasions.

The dunces of the first, the lively giddy-brain'd sort, are the worst of the two; or, at least, the most incurable. Their want of capacity puts it out of their power to produce

duce any thing themselves, and their great vivacity makes them incapable of learning any thing from other people.

There is less difficulty in improving a person of mean understanding, than in correcting a wrong-headed one.

VI.

There are understandings, that are excellent, capable of inventing, discovering, and pushing their discoveries as far as they will go : there are others, which have but half-views, confused and narrow ideas of things, in which, however, they have something true and new : and, lastly, others, which, incapable of these half-views, and of any idea that is strictly new, are yet very capable of disposing and improving such as shall be communicated to them. A sentence in some obscure book, which any body else would have passed without the least reflection ; a hint accidentally thrown out in conversation ; in a word, the least glimpse of a thought that can be, is to such persons a source of many thoughts, equally solid and ingenious. The least matter in the world serves to set them on thinking ; but something they must have ; for they would never start any thing themselves. There are in the world many geniuses of this character ; and the commonwealth of learning has as many obligations to them, as to their superiors.

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The soil that is most favourable to the birth and production of certain plants, is not always the best for their growth. They must be transplanted elsewhere, to make them thrive, and come to any thing. It is the same with a great many good thoughts, which would have been lost in the understanding, where they first sprung up, if they had not been moved into another.

VII.

Performances, the principal aim of which is to divert, rather than instruct, we commonly look upon as purely trifling; and this justly enough, in one sense: yet a person, who reads such things with reflection, shall learn a great deal from them. There is a way of reading plays and romances, which intirely changes the nature of those works. They become pieces of philosophy in the hands of a philosophical reader. They set him upon deep thought. By reflecting upon the sentiments they raise in him, by inquiring into the causes of his pleasure, he informs himself upon the nature of the art, that has been employed to please him; and, what is of still greater importance, he learns to know himself, to know man.

VIII.

The understanding (and especially that faculty of it, which we call imagination, and is the parent of works of entertainment) must be humoured.

humoured. We must by no means go to force it, or require more from it than it is willing to give. Besides that the efforts, which we put it upon in those seasons of inactivity and sterility, are commonly ineffectual; they are likewise very dangerous to health, and may in time reduce a person to an absolute debility and incapacity of thinking at all. How many studious people are there, who have been spendthrifts of their genius, and, by using it too freely, are utterly deprived of it!

My performances never cost me any thing, said a person to me, who has obliged us with some very good ones. I never force myself to study, when I find I am not disposed for it. When thoughts offer themselves, I take up my pen; and, when I am exhausted, I lay it down again. All the study I use for good things, is but to lie still, and wait for them.

There are persons of considerable parts, that, by reason of the delicacy of their temperament, are incapable of much application. Two hours study exhausts them, and robs them of half their genius. If they will still persist in their composition, in spite of this decay, their productions will infallibly bear marks of their debility. And this, undoubtedly, is one reason of the inequality we observe in some pieces of poetry and eloquence, and even of the difference we find, sometimes, between the performances of the same

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same author. These pieces are not all, or the same piece not throughout, of the same force and spirit ; because the author of them composed them at times, when he was very different from himself. We imagine sometimes, with reason enough, that we see two different hands in such pieces : and, in fact, they cannot be said to be the work of the same genius, though they are of the same person.

IX.

Let us take, on one side, the most ignorant and the most learned of men ; and, on the other, the man of the greatest capacity, and the man of the least. I affirm, that the man of parts surpasses his opposite more, in that respect, than the man of learning does the ignorant one in point of knowledge. Besides, the difference between the man of parts and the dunce is a more valuable and important one, than that between the scholar and the ignorant. Yet this latter difference is a good deal more perceptible, and more striking, than the other. It is easy to shew in what it consists. The scholar understands the languages, history, mathematics, &c. The ignorant knows none of these, and, at the same time, he knows his own ignorance. Hence the extravagant admiration, which the vulgar have for men of learning.

Ignorance knows itself by itself ; but a person cannot know his want of capacity,
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but by the help of capacity. Stupidity does not know itself at all. The ignorant judges more honourably of the scholar, than the dunce does of the man of parts. Our ignorance commonly magnifies in our eyes the knowledge of others ; whereas our dulness diminishes their understanding. A person is capable of discerning the capacity of other men, but in proportion as he has a share of it himself.

The generality of dunces think themselves only ignorant.

X.

The greatest obstacle to the knowledge of truth is not so much the weakness of the human understanding, as our humours, passions, and prejudices. A person is in an error : you endeavour to undeceive him, and employ the simplest, clearest, and most undeniable arguments you can think of, for this purpose ; but without convincing him, or making the least impression upon him. He does not seem to understand you. You are surpris'd at it, and cry out, How false an understanding has this man ! how stupid is he ! Or, perhaps, you suspect him of insincerity. But you mistake the matter extremely ; and if you would discover the true cause of his obstinacy, reason with him upon any other point ; make choice of the most abstract and profound you can think of, and bring the most refined

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refined and complicated arguments for your own side of the question. You will find he shall presently understand you, applaud your reasoning, and wonder there can be a man living of a different opinion from what you have been supporting. You will then allow he has sense, tho', a moment before, you thought he had none. The truth is, he has always enough, when he can but make use of what he has. The principle of right judgment is not placed in the intellect only, and the effect of a penetrating and extensive genius ; but it has also a necessary dependence upon the moral character. Persons of the greatest genius are not always the justest thinkers ; and we often meet with a much sounder judgment in persons of moderate capacity, that are free from passion and humour, and of mild and even tempers.

XI.

M. N**** is a person of great parts and great knowledge ; but, at the same time, the most given to contradiction, the fullest of humour and vanity, of any man living. Hence he is frequently guilty of the most shocking rudeness, and the most outrageous extravagance. He never talks with any tolerable temper, but when he leads the discourse. It is not enough, that you do not contradict him. There is as much danger in being of his opinion, as against it ; for he will quit and oppose the opinion he had espoused,

espoused, the moment any body else adopts it. There is, therefore, no security but in an absolute silence. It is true, you make him silent by this means, and deprive yourself of the pleasure of hearing him ; because he has no longer any inclination to talk, than he has somebody to contradict and dispute with him.

XII.

The man of fine understanding is difficult, or, rather, delicate, in his opinions ; and cannot help being concerned, in some measure, that he is so ; because he is sensible what he loses by it : at least, he endeavours to appear otherwise, and does what he can to disguise himself. On the contrary, a blockhead shall find fault with every thing, like nothing, and affect to be thought difficult, without really being so. Can any thing be more ridiculous ?

A person of this make was inveighing against a performance of the moderate kind. Sir, says one that heard him, Take care what you say : you are surely mistaken. This ought to appear in your eyes a fine performance.

Wit, taste, and knowledge, make fewer people difficult, than humour, vanity, and ill-nature.

However, dunces would never think of affecting to appear difficult, if the generality of the men of parts were not really so. But they

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they are, and it is very natural they should. Our own age, for instance, is very difficult, and hard to be pleased, in matters of wit ; and so it would be, if there was no such thing as vanity or ill-nature in the world. It is but the natural effect of that multitude of good books, which have enriched the learned world within these hundred years, and which make, perhaps, the most considerable part of its possessions. Enlightened by these works, we understand better, and have a quicker sense of, the faults of those which appear at this time. We are no less improved in our discernment of their beauties ; but, being before accustomed to those that were equal, or, perhaps, superior, they make the less impression upon us. The grand pleasures of reading were the lot of our fathers. After a long and severe fast, in matters of wit and genius, they found themselves, of a sudden, as it were, in the midst of the most exquisite variety. To put us in the same situation that they were in, in this respect, it would require works very superior to those we are already possessed of : it would be necessary, that our age should as much surpass the last, as that did the preceding ones ; which, perhaps, is a thing impossible.

The good writers make the good judges. Their works enlighten them, and form their taste. And, in their turn, the good judges make the good writers. Those agreeable
honours,

honours, with which they reward true genius, give life and motion to it, where-ever it is. But when the men of skill and judgment, through a surfeit they have taken, or an excess of delicacy they have contracted, from the abundance of good performances, leave off praising, and come to find fault with every thing, good writers become more scarce. Genius ever languishes and droops when it has no longer sufficient encouragement to support it ; and it is by this means, that a plenty of good things must always, by a natural consequence, produce a scarcity.

There are authors, that would be in much higher esteem and regard than they are, if they had never published but half of what they have. Not but, perhaps, their works are all pretty near equally good ; but they are too numerous. They follow one another too close. The public is overdone with them. The pleasure it receives from them flattens, and it is concluded from thence, that the works themselves do the same. Besides, till an author is grown too voluminous, it may be thought, that his performances stand him in some pains and study ; which is a circumstance that considerably enhances the value of them with the world. When he publishes too much, and too frequently, to leave room for this opinion, he is sure to sink in his reputation ; to sink by

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the very circumstance, which ought to give the greatest lustre to it.

XIII.

We meet in authors of genius with singular expressions, new-coined words, and bold and surprising turns. Their phrases are sometimes composed of words which are not commonly found together, and which do not seem to have been made for one another. What an odd style ! cries a critic : What jargon ! This is not *French* ; it has not the current stamp upon it. But let me tell the critic, if it has not the current stamp upon it, it is great pity but it had, when it is neat and close, full of life and energy. But such are several expressions and ways of speaking, which have been found fault with in some new performances. They are very expressive of the ideas of the persons that have employed them, and imprint them upon the mind of the reader with the same force and vivacity which they had in that of the author at the time that he wrote. I have seen persons of good sense, but of the plainer sort, that have been offended with expressions of this kind, because they appeared singular, and not pure *French* ; and have attempted to change them and substitute others in their room, less bold and irregular. But they were quickly convinced, that such a correction in the language could not be made without injury to the thoughts ;
and

and that, while they made the author express himself better, they made his conception the worse. This, now, is an apology for, or, rather, an encomium upon, the authors found fault with ; and, in a word, when a person, while he passes his censure, is obliged to wish what he censures were but allowable, I take the liberty to conclude, that it is allowable,

To reason upon the principles of some writers, persons are in great error, that are so fond, as most people are, of *Montaigne's* style, and think it so agreeable. *Montaigne's* is a jargon even for the time in which he wrote. His contemporaries charged him with it. He had no regard to the current language, but took the liberty of disposing of it as his own proper goods. He made no scruple of dispensing with the common rules of expression ; an easy way, sure, of saying every thing a person has a mind to say ! Who is there, that might not, if he had a mind, be witty upon these terms ?

XIV.

We always judge somewhat differently of a work, whose author we are acquainted with, from what we should, if he was a stranger to us. Abstracting from that prepossession, which may arise from our good or ill will to him ; such an acquaintance with the author of a performance makes us

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commonly see beauties or faults in him, which we should never have seen without.

It would not be the interest of the generality of authors, to be known to their readers.

They are not always an author's friends, that have the best opinion of his writings.

If Mr. such-a-one, said a person, should publish any thing, that I thought well of, I should rather believe myself mistaken, than believe it really deserved it.

M. de ***** gave me great commendations of a book, that had been published. Two days after, he talked of it with as much contempt. He had seen the author in the mean time.

XV.

We see a person for the first time ; we are charmed with his conversation, and think he has an infinite deal of wit. Yet, perhaps, the things that he has said are such, as we should have taken no notice of from the persons we daily converse with.

In esteem and friendship, and even in love, there are a great many little trifling inconsistencies, which a person must not appear to observe.

XVI.

A person said to another, I know your worth, but you do not know mine. The first was a man of taste and judgment ; the other of genius and imagination.

All

All persons of wit are not good judges in matters of wit. It would be no small compliment to tell a person, that he found wit in all that had it.

A man of wit may appear a dunce, not only to one that is a dunce himself, but even to another man of wit, and this without any prejudice in the case.

XVII.

The finest inventions are owing, in a great measure, to chance. We rather light upon things, than find them out ; and this, however, implies good eyes. A fool often lights upon a thing, without being ever the better for it. Like the cock in the fable, he sees, he touches, a thing of great value, and leaves it behind for want of knowing it.

Chance frequently throws things in our way, which, in the hands of proper persons, might have made happy discoveries.

It frequently happens, that a man of genius, while he is looking for one thing, finds another ; and we say, in that case, that he found it by chance : but as he was in the way that led to it, and had done every thing, tho' with a different view, that was necessary in order to find it, his finding it, as has been well observed, ought to be looked upon but as a sort of half-chance, which takes scarce any thing at all from the honour of the inventor *.

* *Father Castel.*

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As to discoveries like that of the *Indian*, who, as it is said, found out the mines of *Peru*, by pulling a shrub that grew upon one of them ; they are undeniably and absolutely to be imputed to chance. And there are many of this sort of discoveries,

XVIII.

It is a very rare talent, that of fathoming and going to the bottom of things ; of viewing them in every light, and observing the differences there are between those that seem alike, and the resemblance between those that seem to be most different. Yet, however valuable this talent may be in itself, a person must not give himself up to it too much ; for it borders very nearly upon two faults ; tediousness, by being too exact ; and obscurity, by being too subtle.

XIX.

The qualities of the heart, which we desire most to find, and which we relish most, in others, are such as we are wanting in, ourselves. It is quite the reverse with regard to the qualities of the understanding. We love and relish chiefly, in others, such as we have in common along with them.

A person of a just and delicate understanding will have more liking and relish for one of the same character, than for one of a sparkling imagination and sprightly wit. The man of imagination shall give him a
more

more lively pleasure for a few moments. He will be charmed with his company, as often as he meets with it ; but, perhaps, he would not chuse to live with him. But the other shall be a constant companion, a man of all hours for him. He cannot be long from him without uneasiness ; nor ever with him without pleasure.

But, to start another point, let me ask, Whether we esteem in others the same talents we have, or fancy we have, ourselves, more than those we have not ? It should seem, at first view, that we must, from a natural effect of our selfishness. But, on the other hand, it is natural for us to set less value upon what we have, than upon what we have not ; and I believe, that the indifference which accompanies possession, and that envious kind of esteem we entertain for a thing we are not masters of, reaches, sometimes, even to the faculties of the mind. Thus, on one hand, our vanity leads us to esteem only those talents we are ourselves possessed of, or, at least, to prefer them to every other kind ; and, on the other hand, it is a natural effect of possession, to lower them in our own eyes. Here are two causes, then, that act in opposition to one another ; and the strongest must carry it. Persons of a less strong and active vanity entertain a higher opinion of the endowments they want, than of those they possess, even when their own are the

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most valuable. Others, and the much greatest number, blinded by their vanity, set no value upon any but their own. No man has understanding, with these people, but themselves, and such as are like them. This is only esteeming themselves in other men.

Generally speaking, the persons we esteem most, are those whom we resemble in little. We see in them that kind of excellence and merit, which we have ourselves; and we see it in a degree very superior to that, in which we possess it.

XX.

Subjects of ridicule are more striking, and, perhaps, more common, in persons of sense, than in those that have none; at least, it is certain, that there are several follies of this sort, that suppose a degree of understanding, tho' it be true at the same time, that they proceed only from the want of it.

The complete dunce is a person quite uniform, and, as we say, all of a piece. He is just what nature made him, affects nothing, pretends to nothing; a *mere piece of clock-work, a machine, a puppet* *; and, of consequence, tedious, heavy, and disagreeable; but he is not, properly speaking, ridiculous, or, at least, not risible.

The coxcomb is more ridiculous than the dunce.

* *Bruyere.*

Dunces, that are absolutely so, and knaves, are not good characters for comedy. The one are not worth laughing at, and the other, if you would laugh at them, would not be punished as they deserved by it. The dunce is the proper object only of contempt or pity. The vicious person, or, rather, indeed, his vice, calls for hatred. But the natural object of raillery and satire are those oddities and extravagancies we see frequently in persons of sense, especially when they proceed from an abuse of their sense, or knowledge, or endowments of any kind whatsoever.

Let us take our best comedies that are in vogue, and we shall see, that the principal personage, that is exposed in them, is generally a man of sense, and who owes it, in some measure, to his sense, that he is the subject of ridicule.

For this reason, these ridiculous characters ought never to be overcharged. When they are carried to excess, they are inconsistent with the supposition of any share of sense, and give so much the less entertainment to persons of fine understanding.

It has been observed, that *Don Quixot* has never succeeded upon the stage, tho' he diverts us so much in the book that bears his name. It is not that *Don Quixot*, as *Cervantes* has drawn him, is a character purely chimerical, and out of nature. But the case is, that the good knight is more an enthu-

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enthusiast, than a coxcomb. And an enthusiast may be a person of great sense, and even prudence, in some respects, of which I might give instances in our own times. The character of *Don Quixot*, therefore, is, strictly speaking, possible; that is, enough so, for a romance, but not enough for a comedy, which is much more confined to probability, than a romance is.

XXI.

It is an advantage to every particular person, not to have too much sense. Those who have the least share, are commonly the happiest persons. It is an advantage to the world in general, that there is not more sense in it, than there is; and, perhaps, things would go but so much the better, if there was still less. The most necessary and important affairs of life are carried on by persons of small-capacity. Great geniuses would neither stoop so low, nor be so fit for the undertaking.

XXII.

Dunces are apt to suspect and accuse men of parts, of pride, and often very unjustly. They shall sometimes charge them with this vice, without the least foundation, out of pure malice and envy, and in order to revenge themselves of a merit, that is odious to them, by rendering it so to other people. Indeed sometimes, too, their suspicions are founded

founded upon slight appearances, and their accusations sincere, tho' unjust. A man of parts is scarce ever of the opinion of fools ; or, if he is, it is never for the same reasons. He frequently undervalues or condemns what they esteem and approve. And this conduct has an air of pride, especially if he is an enemy to disguise and falshood, and delivers his sentiments with too much plainness and freedom. I knew a person of very amiable behaviour at *Paris*, that passed in the country for being very proud and difficult, and to be pleased with nothing. He had always appeared to me in a very different light ; and his other friends and myself used to rally him for his excessive easiness in liking things. He was in the country some time ago, said one of his country acquaintance to me ; and, being asked his opinion of some new books, that were then the entertainment of the whole place, he told them very plainly, that they were good for nothing, and that nobody liked them at *Paris*. This did him infinite prejudice with them.

XXIII.

Dunces give so many occasions to men of sense to contradict them, and are, for the most part, so sensible of contradiction, that it is very difficult to live with them, without offending them, and provoking their ill-will.

It

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It is not sufficient, that contradictions are seasoned with a great deal of good-nature and politeness, but they must also be used very sparingly. If they come too often from a person, all the sweetening in the world will not prevent their giving offence.

A man of sense scarce ever ought to contradict a fool ; for he provokes him without instructing him ; and to contradict such people, too, is doing them too much honour. The chagrin it gives men of sense, to hear dunces talk, is owing to mere weakness.

XXIV.

Persons would not willingly be known for what they are, and men of sense are apt to be very quick-sighted. It is not an easy matter to conceal one's faults from them. Let them seem to be ever so careless of what passes, yet still we impute it all to their politeness. We stand in fear of them, and from fear to hatred the transition is very short. Thus their very judgment is called pride, and the goodness of their faculties imputed to them as a vice.

XXV.

Dunces are very sensible of contempt. This is natural enough. They are commonly more so than men of sense ; for it is the truth they are offended with. They hate the persons by whom they are despised, which is still natural. They readily believe
they

they are despised. In this they do themselves justice. They impute this contempt they think persons have for them, to pride. This is equally unjust and ridiculous.

XXVI.

You hate me, I know, *Lycas*, and I deserve your hatred. I have not been master enough of myself to conceal my contempt of you. After having long flattered you, spleen and indignation have, at length, extorted from me my real sentiments in regard to you. I am wrong, I own, in having so little command of myself. How just soever a person's contempt may be, it is scarce ever right to express it. I ought to have been more upon my guard, and I shall always reproach myself for my weakness. See, now, my repentance, and accept my apology; but if this will not satisfy you, and you are absolutely bent upon vengeance, tell every body, that I am ill-bred; but do not say, that I am proud.

XXVII.

Dunces dislike men of sense, because the men of sense have no esteem for dunces. A dunce might like a man of sense; if he could have any opinion of the dunce, or, at least, make him believe, that he had. This may seem easy to be done, but very frequently is not so. Tho' the dunce is fond of being esteemed; yet it is not easy for him

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him to persuade himself, that he is so ; because he is conscious to himself, that he has nothing in him that can merit esteem.

I asked a person once, Why he did not like a man of merit, that I knew had professed a great friendship for him ? It is not friendship, said he, that I want of him, but esteem. He knows very well, that I have a great deal for him ; and therefore he is ungrateful, in not making a return. But he seems to me, said I, to have the same for you ; and I have seen him give you several marks of it. I am not to be deceived by these, replied he ; I know his heart very well. He thinks I love to be flattered, and he flatters me : so he adds dissimulation to ingratitude. But I am as quick of apprehension as himself, in some things.

A man of parts will sooner love a dunce, than a dunce will a man of parts. In general, we love our inferiors better than our superiors, and this holds good in all cases whatsoever.

XXVIII.

I meet with a person in company, whom I do not know ; and I hear him say, with an air of resentment, that another, who is equally unknown to me, is proud. If I was to give my opinion, which of the two was a person of the best understanding, I should give it for him that was absent.

Pride is a vice, that is common enough ; but one of its principal effects is, to make us be-

believe it still more common than it is, by making us see it where it is not.

Pride is sometimes so much the more odious, as it is accompanied with greater merit.

XXIX.

Some men of parts, as I have said elsewhere, talk but little in conversation; and it is frequently imputed to them for pride. They will not condescend, it is said, to talk before persons they think are not capable of understanding them. They have no honour to gain by it. Or else it is supposed they are silent, because they have nothing good to say; and do not care to speak, but when they can shine. I own, this opinion of them is often very just. They are silent, upon some occasions, from the same motive that they talk upon others, that is, their vanity. But yet this is a notion, that must not be applied too rashly; for as it is not always owing to vanity, that such persons endeavour to say good things; so neither is it, that they are above saying common and indifferent ones. A man of fine sense knows, that he could make himself admired at a very easy rate; but the approbation of other people gives him no pleasure, unless he could have his own. He has no pleasure in talking, but when he can talk well, because he likes nothing but what is good. He is difficult, rather than vain. In short, he does not care to say low things, things ill
thought

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thought and ill expressed, for the same reason, that it gives him pain to hear them. He is afraid of tiring himself, as well as other people.

XXX.

If I was to hear it said of a person, that he had the best sense of any man in the place where he lived, and, at the same time, was the best-beloved ; I should say, that he was a man of ten thousand, and should conceive the highest idea of him that is possible. I should also have a very good opinion of his neighbours.

A man of parts is not always beloved, and it is frequently his own fault, that he is not ; but it is likewise frequently the fault of those who do not love him.

To love a person very well, and yet esteem him no more than he ought to be esteemed ; and to esteem a person very much, and yet love him as much as he deserves ; are two things almost equally rare.

XXXI.

The conclusion of all this is, that a man of parts cannot be too cautious of his behaviour with the common run of the world. This is the very point, that ought to employ his natural and acquired advantages ; and can he possibly make a better use of them ? A talent for society is preferable to every other that can be named, and the knowledge of life above that of all the sciences ; and the
qua-

qualities that make a man beloved, are, at bottom, those that make him most esteemed. Let a person of fine intellects consider, that, far from having a right upon this score to violate the rules of society, they are, in reality stricter for him than for common men. The same things that a dunce might say without offence, may give great offence in a man of sense. No regard is taken of what a silly fellow says, because it is supposed he has not much guard upon his words, or because every thing he can say is contemptible. If he would affront, he cannot; but the man of sense affronts without intending it. A fool shall often do himself less mischief, by saying the most ill-natured things, than a man of sense by a single word dropt indiscreetly. A fool, properly speaking, can do himself no hurt, let him say what he will, because he does none to other people. The offence is always measured by the worth of the offender.

XXXII.

There is more sense, and less honesty, in capital cities, and other large towns, in proportion, than in the country, and your little villages. The degree of understanding people have, depends, in a great measure, upon their education, which is commonly best in great towns. Education, being only the cultivation of the natural genius, can make but little difference between such as are born

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dunces ;

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dunces ; but it makes a considerable one between those who are born with good faculties. It is frequently observed, how much difference there is between two persons without education ; suppose two peasants ; if the one has good natural parts, and the other not. But we see a more considerable difference between two men both born with that happy conformation of the organs, which gives a good understanding, in case the one has had education, and the other not ; or, at least, not so good a one.

Sense depends too, in a great measure, upon the exercise it has, and the employment people have for it. But your considerable towns afford many more opportunities and inducements to exercise and employ the understanding, than can be had in little villages. And it is exercise and opportunity, that make men ; or, at least, discover, both to others and themselves, what they are capable of.

A great number of those who have the best sense and capacity, leave the country, and go to the capital.

Lastly, By conversing with one another, men correct their prejudices, enlarge their knowledge, quicken their industry, and, in a word, improve their understandings ; and, consequently, the larger their acquaintance is, the more proper it is to produce these effects.

On

On the other hand, there is commonly less probity in great towns, than in little ones. Men formed themselves into societies, in order to protect themselves from the mischievous designs of one another ; and they are become more mischievous in these societies, than they were when they lived wild in a state of solitude. The association of mankind has as natural and necessary a tendency to corrupt their manners, as to improve their understandings.

I am not saying, that we have any reason to wish for the state of nature again, even with respect to the point in question. It is true, in the social state, the wicked and dishonest are in greater numbers, and in a higher degree, than they would have been in a state of nature ; but then we have more remedies against them. If we live amongst beasts of prey, it is our comfort, that they are chained ; and, to give my judgment by the way, I cannot but think, the common method of ranging the ages of the world is very injudicious. Sound philosophy shews it absurd, and history proves it false. The iron age must have been, and, in reality, was the first. The brazen age succeeded it, and was followed by the silver age, which is our own. It will be said, perhaps, that it is rather the age of brass : but, surely, the difference between the condition of our first ancestors and ourselves, is more than a degree. We may carry our ideas still further,

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and without running into any thing romantic, we may easily conceive the possibility of a state happier than that which we are in ; and this, whenever it happens, will be the golden age.

XXXIII.

The moral part of education is better in large towns, than in the country, as well as the literal : yet it does not follow from hence, that they have better morals in general. Education makes even less difference between persons born knaves, than between those that are born fools. The most advantageous notion we can have of education, with respect to morals, is, that it is a habit seasonably contracted. But a habit contracted against strong natural propensities, and especially if it be quite forced and involuntary, never surmounts nature. *Horace* says,

Naturam expellas furca, tamen usq; recurret.

It is true, indeed, what he says in another place,

*Nil adeo durum est, quod non mansuescere possit,
Dummodo cultura patientem accommodet aurem.*

But

But this tractable and docile disposition, which he requires, in order to make education effectual, is seldom found in the children that most need it.

XXXIV.

Great numbers of people come from out of the country to the capital, to make their fortune there ; that is to say, to learn and to practise knavery.

Bad examples are so much the more contagious, as they are more numerous ; and, in general, the more numerous societies are, the more they are corrupted.

XXXV.

But, supposing the conversation of a large city did not make men more wicked than they were ; yet it gives them an opportunity of putting in practice whatever their natural wickedness and corruption might incline them to, by improving their understanding and their courage. How many men are there, that have every qualification of great villains, but boldness and industry ?

XXXVI.

Sense and knowledge are sometimes seen to correct a bad natural disposition ; but, for the most part, they serve only to make it more refinedly and dangerously wicked,

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It is in the most polite and enlightened ages, that we have instances of the greatest virtues, and the greatest vices.

The refining of mens minds, says Montaigne, is not always for the advantage of their manners.

XXXVII.

There are crimes that cannot be the work of a single man ; and designs of this sort die in the breast that conceived them, for want of an associate and accomplice to put them in execution.

You shall see two men notorious for their villainies, that might have been honest men, or, rather, harmless knaves, all their lifetime, if they had never happened to meet with each other. But they came both to *Paris*, perhaps, from the two extremities of the kingdom ; and, at *Paris*, the villain never fails of finding his like.

XXXVIII.

In great towns, mens passions are stronger, and the opportunities of doing ill more frequent. Crimes meet not with that discouragement they should, either from justice, the pursuits of which a person may the more easily escape in a croud ; or yet from the public hatred : for, when crimes become common, they grow less odious.

One of the principal advantages in great towns, is the liberty a person enjoys in them. Peoples attention is divided among an infinite number of objects, so that there is less bestowed upon any particular person ; and a man may live as he likes, without any fear of being thought singular ; not merely because he is not observed, but also because in so great a number of people, let a man be as singular as he will, he will always meet with some like himself. The philosopher finds his advantage in this liberty, as it enables him to live to his own humour, without subjecting himself to any troublesome restraints. The debauchee finds his, by being enabled to follow his vices with secrecy.

XXXIX.

Lastly, There is less religion in great towns, and especially capitals, than in little ones. Infidelity, so unhappily common in the former, is scarce known in the latter. At *Paris*, and at *London*, persons of the greatest religion themselves, shall hear it said, without the least emotion, that such and such persons have none at all. In the country, things of this kind would shock people extremely. They would not be thought possible. But now, whatever a false subtilty and refinement may suggest, religion is a very great check upon the practice of vice. It is the most solid founda-

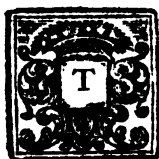
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tion of society, because it furnishes the strongest inducements to probity. Want of faith very easily draws after it the want of honour. When persons no longer fear God, because they do not believe in him, they will still have less fear of men ; because they despise them, and look upon their judgments as an effect of prejudice.





A
P A R A L L E L
B E T W E E N
L I F E *and* S T U D Y .



THE person, that, having just past the dark state of infancy, and the giddy thoughtlessness of childhood, begins to perceive, that he lives, and to make some reflection upon his existence ; and the person, who being free from the restraint of tutorage, applies himself, of his own taste, and voluntary choice, to the search of truth. These two persons, I say, enter upon two very different courses or pursuits ; that of life, and that of study.

The person who enters upon life, does not see the end of it, tho' he cannot but be fully apprised, that it has one. He sees persons daily arrive at it, who no more know the precise time of it, than himself. This is what chiefly secures him from im-
posing

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posing upon himself in this matter. For he would be but too apt to conclude, that the space he had to run was infinite, if experience did not shew him how it is bounded.

Fifty or sixty years appear an infinite duration to a young man, as two or three guineas are thought an immense fortune by a child.

On the contrary, he that enters upon the course of study, and sets out with a design to improve his understanding with every thing that is worth knowing, commonly proposes to himself a certain time, in which he flatters himself he shall have attained his end, and be able to rest from his researches.

A young man has no notion of what an old one tells him of the shortness and transiency of life; nor of what a learned man tells him of the extent of knowledge.

Scarcely has he, who has entered upon life, begun his course, but he has finished it. He has taken a few steps forward, and he finds himself at his journey's end. The period he so little expected surprises him all at once, and arrests him in the midst of his course.

The man of study, on the other hand, who thinks he sees the end of his labours not far off, when he arrives at the point his imagination had pitched upon, is astonished at the immense distance it still appears from

from him. It seems to be farther off, than when he set out in pursuit of it. Every step he takes towards it, seems to lengthen his journey ; as fast as he advances, so fast it flies before him, till at length he quite loses sight of it, or sees it at such an immeasurable distance, as makes him utterly despair of ever overtaking it. And then it is, that he has arrived at the only end he is capable of attaining. For it is he only who has wisdom enough to know, that knowledge is not an attainable pursuit, that can be said to know in what true knowledge consists.

In the journey of life, men are always moving forward, and that as fast as they are able ; and, if they may be believed, they would be glad it were shorter by the greatest part of it. Yet, whenever it ends, it ends with death, the thing which, of all others, they hate and fear the most. Strange inconsistency ! Life is very short, they cry, and yet every day of it they think too long. They would willingly shorten most of their days, and even cut off some of them intirely, without reflecting, that, by so doing, they must take so much from the length of their lives.

In study, men march with a slow, sober pace, frequently stopping, and even sometimes turning back. Persons forget what they knew. They discover, especially in matters of philosophy, that they did not know what they fancied they did ; and that
the

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the whole effect of their laborious application, in many things, has been only to add error to ignorance. This made M. Nicole say, *I unlearn something every day of my life.* The further onward we get in the road of life, the more fatiguing we find it. Youth has more miseries and misfortunes attending it, than infancy ; and our troubles seem to multiply with our years.

In that of study, it is the first entrance only, that is difficult ; after a time, we come into a smoother track ; and the farther a person has gone, the easier he finds it.

The wisest of living men is he who thinks himself nearest to death, and regulates all his motions upon this persuasion :

Whereas the most rational pursuer of knowledge is the person who thinks it farthest off ; and who, whatever share he has acquired, whatever advances he has made, continues his application, as if he yet knew nothing at all, and marches with the same speed, as when he first set out.





O F

Regard to HUMAN JUDGMENT.



It is a hard task to bear testimony to the truth, at the expence of one's interest ; but it is sometimes a harder to declare for it, when a person by doing so is liable to have it suspected, that his interest was the motive. There are men of a certain make, that would brave death and torments, but would sink under the fear of a suspicion to their disadvantage. There is an interest which they look upon as of much more importance than that of their fortune, or even life itself ; and this is their reputation. They could stand up in defence of persecuted truth, but want courage to speak for it, when it is triumphant. They would make intrepid and zealous sectarists, but are timorous and bashful catholics.

M. de Turenne, and *M. Pellisson*, both born in the bosom of heresy, were sensible of their errors a long time before they abjured them. It seems it cost them great struggles

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struggles to get above the censure of a certain public.

I own, that it was necessary, for the confusion of heresy, and the honour of the church, that they should proceed so discreetly in declaring their conversion, as to leave no room for imputing it to any human motives, and to give their example all the weight that it was capable of. And yet, perhaps, they were rather too slow in this business, and a view to their own glory had too large a share in it. *M. Pelisson* did not declare himself, till after the disgrace he had incurred upon *M. Fouquet's* account was intirely at an end; tho', in spite of his delays, he was still suspected of being influenced by this circumstance. *M. Turenne* was arrived at the first honours of war, when he publicly renounced protestantism. He was willing not to leave the least ground for believing, that his conversion had contributed to his advancement, or that the desire of his advancement had the least hand in his conversion. This great man, who had so often seen death without concern, was possibly too much affected by the fear of an ill-natured construction upon his conduct. I should look upon his conversion as the most glorious action of his life, if it had been but earlier. It might probably, in that case, have been suspected by persons that did not know him. But what greatness of soul would he have shewn, in a defiance of such unjust

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unjust suspicions ! What is it, that, in reality, makes an action glorious, but its being good and just, and, at the same time, difficult ? And, what is it that is difficult to men of a certain make ? Is it to expose their life and fortune ? Not in the least ; but it is to expose, to sacrifice their glory. This is what M. *Turenne* did on several occasions, and it is one of the noblest and most singular of the praises which the public and his panegyrists have given him, That his own reputation was less dear to him, than the public good, and the lives of his soldiers. Like *Fabius*, he was deaf to all the vain reports which malice and ignorance give birth to on such occasions, and which wisdom itself is sometimes drawn in to credit.

The motives that influence us, determine the rule that we act upon. It is therefore not at all surprising, that the opinions of men should be the rule to persons who act with no other view but that of engaging these opinions in their favour. Yet, such are many of those who would pass for great men. The love of glory is their principal motive. M. *de Turenne's* was a sense of duty : and to this he owed that heroic indifference, that general disposition to all sorts of virtue, which duty only is capable of determining to a particular choice, and giving it a direction according to the exigence of circumstances.

If

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If M. *de Turenne*'s conduct was somewhat different in the affair of his conversion, it is because he had more regard to the character of a mere honest man, than that of a great commander ; and was more tender of his reputation, if the *distinction* may be allowed, than of his glory.

However, this is the only fault of the kind, that he can be charged with ; and, perhaps, it is an utter mistake to charge him with this. It is possible, that such a weakness as we have been mentioning, had no share in his conduct, and he was governed intirely in it, by a regard to his lady : a compliance, without doubt, not strictly justifiable, but, in some measure, to be excused, by the singular merit of the person who was the object of it. The illustrious historian of this great hero will, I hope, set this important point in its proper light.





THE
UNCERTAINTY
OF

*Any Judgment that can be formed
upon Human Actions.*

I.



REAT experience, the careful study of history, and deep reflection upon the principles, of which the human heart is composed, and upon the different combination of these principles, are the means of coming to the knowledge of the human heart. But, with all these assistances, this knowledge is, at best, but very imperfect. There is always something we cannot reach, at the bottom of the heart we think we have seen furthest into ; and the greatest perfection we can arrive at in this art, will afford us but some uncertain conjectures upon the principles of mens actions.

To make a sure judgment upon the motive of an action, it is not sufficient to be thoroughly acquainted with the author of it ; but one must also be fully informed of the

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circumstances under which he acted. It is the same with regard to the foresight of future actions, which are to be guessed at from the same lights and informations as the motives of past. A person, therefore, would run great hazard of being deceived, that was to judge of a man's dispositions from what he did in any case; or, of what he would do, from knowing his disposition. Some trifling circumstance, perhaps, unknown to you, occasioned that resolution, the motive of which you are seeking after; and therefore your search must be in vain: and in the same manner must your conjecture be as uncertain, upon the part a person shall act upon any given occasion, that is to say, under any certain assemblage of circumstances. For there may be other circumstances than those upon which your reasoning is built; and, if there be, you reason in the dark. A single circumstance, which you left out in your supposition, shall overthrow all your conjectures, and make the person act the very reverse of what you expected.

In morals, as well as physics, the solidity of a system depends sometimes upon a trifle; or, rather, in forming a system, every thing is of importance. A person must be fully assured of the nature of the facts, upon which it is to stand, and which he undertakes to explain. The least uncertainty, in this respect, ought to put a stop to the attempt, because the slightest mistake would be sufficient

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cient to overturn the whole edifice, and make the whole proceeding look very ridiculous.

II.

In order to account for past actions, or conjecture at future, we must always reason upon the supposition, that men have common sense ; tho' we may be frequently at a loss to reconcile actions with this supposition, for want of knowing the whole of the case. Thus, events, which had nothing extraordinary in them to those who lived at the time when they happened, appear to us incomprehensible, because we are unacquainted with the springs, upon which they turned. If we knew these, we should see, either that men were not void of common sense in such occasions, or else, that it was natural for them to be so. It has been seen, that persons, without any religion, have declared openly for a sect under persecution, and exposed themselves to the greatest sufferings by it. Those who were intimately acquainted with them, no doubt of it, knew upon what principles they acted ; but it must be quite inexplicable to other people.

III.

We must be cautious how we fix the bounds of possibility in every thing that depends upon mens way of thinking. Prodigies are common in this matter ; or, rather, we should count nothing a prodigy, when

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we are acquainted with man. The passions, infinitely combined with one another, and with the weakness of the human mind, produce every day the most unaccountable conduct.

Can it be said, that Christians have common sense and prudence in acting as they act, while they believe what they believe? Surely it cannot; without doubt they act unreasonably; and yet they act in a manner too conformable to nature, in one sense, which is to suffer one's self to be carried away by the force of appetite and passion. Instead, therefore, of saying, that men must be supposed always to act with common sense, it would be more just to say, that they act according to their nature: for we must not contradict nature to give an account of human actions; and every supposition, that does so, must be rejected. But it is the nature of man to be governed more by his passion, than his reason. Sometimes reason and passion unite, when the former is seduced and brought over by the latter. Sometimes too, it is so apparent on which side the right of the case lies, that reason cannot be byassed. Yet, in that case, if the passion is strong in a certain degree, it is nevertheless mistress of the action; and the resistance which reason makes to it, shall scarce be enough to give a man uneasiness: for mere reflections do not much disturb a man's peace, which is seldom much affected, till reason and experience.

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ence meet, and a person is under strong apprehensions of those misfortunes, to which the pursuit of his passions exposes him. But every view of these misfortunes does not produce this apprehension ; nor is it always lasting, when it comes. When it does last, there is always a combat between a person's fears and his passions, in which the strongest must prevail. Frequently the victory continues a long while doubtful ; and, during these agitations, life passes the most unhappily that can be.

Man, therefore, is governed intirely by his passions. It is by these that we must lay hold of him, if we would work upon him. Thus eloquence, which is called the mistress of the will, is only the art of moving the passions. And it is upon this account, that it is obliged to address itself to the imagination, by representing objects under sensible images, which is commonly the only way of moving the passions ; and it might well enough be defined, The art of reaching the heart thro' the imagination. And it is partly for this reason, that a sermon upon hell shall always have more effect, than one upon heaven equally good. For, besides that fear is a stronger motive than hope, we have sensible ideas of hell, which we have not of heaven. There is but little of the sensible kind, in what religion teaches us of the rewards of the virtuous ; whereas there is every thing that is terrible to sense

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in the punishment it threatens to the wicked. Yet, in vain does it threaten them to numbers of Christians, the most firmly persuaded of them, and frequently men of the quickest sense in every thing beside. But the Christian is a man. His faith extinguishes not his passions. That which he sees at a distance, in some measure, changes its nature : from an object of sense it becomes merely a matter of speculation, and is, in a manner, annihilated to our gross perceptions,



O F



O F

I N F I D E L I T Y.



Suspect all infidels, that their heart and morals are not so sound as they should be ; and, if they would speak their minds, they would own, that they distrust one another in this respect. But there are none I suspect more, than those inconsistent deists, who deny a state of future rewards and punishments, and believe that God requires no more of them, than a mere, ineffectual, speculative acknowledgment of his being and greatness, and their own meanness and insignificance. If there is any such thing as a speculative atheist, his scheme hangs much better together. For, to acknowledge God as the author of nature, and not as the punisher and rewarder of human actions, can be only owing to that kind of pride, which takes its rise in the heart. Either God is just, or there is no God at all. And if God is just, then there must be a providence. But, if suffering virtue has nothing

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to hope after this life, nor triumphant wickedness to fear, the notion of providence becomes a mere phantom ; and this attribute of the Deity, by virtue of which chiefly he exists in respect to us, remains without defence against the objections of the atheist. A God, a just God, a providence, another life, are all truths, that are linked together by a necessary connexion ; and to admit some of them, and not the rest, is to break thro' a chain of undeniable consequences, affirm and deny at the same time, and contradict all the rules of reasoning.

Most fatal, but too common an effect of the passions ! There is no evidence so bright, which they will not obscure. The heart suffers the understanding to believe an event, which it fears only at a distance ; and allows it to determine upon points, so long as they remain in some unaffecting general form, and are not yet brought to that critical point, in which a decision must be fatal to it. Of this kind is this grand point of the being of a God, so long as it is a mere question in physics or metaphysics. The bare proof of a God does not of itself affect the heart, and therefore the heart makes no opposition to it. But let us go a step further, and inquire into the connexion this truth has with our conduct ; let it be considered, whether pleasure be the rule of action ; whether the notion all men have of right and wrong, be a law of our Creator, or a prejudice of edu-

education ; whether we are free agents, and our everlasting doom depend upon our good or ill use of our liberty ; and then we shall often see the light of the clearest understanding overcast. It is then that those vapours, which arise from the corruption of the heart, throw a mist over truth too thick for the most piercing faculties to penetrate. You shall see a person admired for his ready apprehension, and good judgment, in business or in science, and who, even upon the principles of philosophy, is capable of putting the proofs of a Supreme Being, the author, preserver, and disposer of all things, in the best light. And yet this very person, this uncommon genius, upon the subject of religion, shall appear the most superficial thinker, the idlest talker, and most pitiful reasoner in the world. To elude disagreeable truths, he will sometimes admit the absurdest principles, and draw from them the most ridiculous consequences. Sometimes he shall deny the most evident consequences, when he is forced to admit the principles they are drawn from. He will swallow the most monstrous contradictions, and take the merest sophistries for demonstration. You, who never heard this celebrated person before, and are equally shocked and provoked at the impiety and extravagance of his discourse ; you cannot possibly allow him to be a man of such fine understanding, and are surprised how he could ever have gained that character.

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rafter. Your surprize is very reasonable, but a word or two may make it cease, if you are tolerably acquainted with the human heart, and the power of its passions. This person, together with his fine parts, is a man of pride, and a man of pleasure.

II.

A person of known infidelity, but usually of an even temper, disputing about religion one day, fell into a good deal of eagerness and violence in it ; but this did not happen till towards the end of the dispute, which he began with great coolness and moderation. Sir, says his antagonist, as they parted, I was under great concern for you at the beginning of our conversation. The coolness with which you talked, made me look upon you as convinced of what you asserted ; but the tone you have taken since, has given me some hopes of you. It is possible you might have an aversion to believing, which is, indeed, unhappy enough, But, however, you certainly believe now ; or, at least, are no further from it than a state of doubt. Take courage, Sir ; your condition is not desperate ; you have felt the force of my arguments, and the weakness of your own replies to them ; your anger tells me you have.

III.

There are few infidels, that are perfectly established in their way of thinking. Religion

gion has too many and striking proofs, to admit of it. The greatest part of them will own, if they care to be sincere, that they are yet in a state of doubt ; and the generality of those that doubt of religion, will own too, that they wish it may be false. A person then, in this situation, that was to give a fair account of himself, would say, I am an infidel, but I have an interest in being so : I wish to be still more and more so : I am fond of finding reasons to support me in my opinion ; and those that oppose it give me a secret concern, in proportion to their strength : I avoid thinking of them as much as possible, and so I do of the proofs on the other side. Is it not, therefore, might such a one ask himself, my partiality that makes me an unbeliever ? I ought to be jealous of my heart's imposing upon me, even tho' religion appeared to me evidently false. But I am far from seeing it in this light. It is not clear to me, that religion is false, or that it is true. But I know, that in cases where there is full evidence on neither side, the heart generally determines us. It is therefore probable, that my infidelity may proceed from this source ; that is to say, that I add to very unwarrantable inclinations the most inexcusable rashness. A very simple and obvious piece of reasoning, capable of being understood by the meanest capacities, and of shaking the most determined resolutions !

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IV.

It is impossible to reconcile religion to the pursuits of our passions : it too plainly condemns them. A person may deceive himself in the more difficult and obscure cases ; but he can never blind himself intirely, with respect to plain and essential duties. Besides, that it would be too tedious to enter into a particular examination of the pleas of every particular passion, in order to know whether they ought to pass, or not ; there is a much more compendious method, and that is, atheism, or the kind of deism I have been mentioning. This point, once gained, secures every other. Let a person but once boldly pronounce, That there is no God, or, That God does not concern himself with our actions ; and all his inquiries are ended, or, rather, prevented ; his scruples all eased, and every thing lies open to his passions. But as it is full as hard a matter to believe, that there is no God, or even that religion is false, as it is to persuade one's self, that it is consistent with our irregularities ; the consequence is, that there is no solid peace, either for the infidel, that denies the truth of religion, or the bad Christian, that lives in contradiction to it.

V.

The truths religion teaches, are both speculative and practical ; and it is for the sake of the latter ; that men come to doubt of the former.

former. The opposition there is to our passions in the morals of Christianity, employs our attention upon the contradiction its mysteries seem to carry in them to our reason.

The true cause of infidelity is the severity of the christian precepts. The obscurity of its mysteries is but the pretence. Persons would believe without difficulty, and even without reflection, if believing was sufficient to save a man.

The proofs of religion, taken all together, are of weight enough to force persons of the best capacity to submit their reason to them ; and clear enough to dispense with the meanest from reasoning at all. It is the heart that weakens and obscures them. The profane person says, There is no God ; but he says it only in his heart. He believes it not, tho' he wishes it ; and his reason reproaches him incessantly with the impossibility of his wishes.

The pagan gods were corrupt, and they were powerful ; that is, they were partly what man is, and partly what he would be.

VI.

Reason is, in respect of faith, what sense is, in respect of reason ; and a Christian ought to have no more reluctance in submitting his reason to his faith, than the philosopher has in preferring his reason to his senses.

VII.

Is there any thing more absurd, than the mysteries of religion ? says an infidel. Yes, it may be replied to him ; and that is, the objections you make against religion, founded upon the pretended absurdity of these mysteries. For the most absurd of all ways of reasoning is that which discovers the most unfair heart, or the most confused head ; and such is all reasoning beside the question. And, whatever the reasonings themselves are, the reasoner is always thought very ridiculous, and unworthy of an answer. But such now are the reasonings of the generality of infidels. They are not to the point in question : they may be unanswerable, perhaps, with respect to some others ; but they are utterly inconclusive against religion, which is ready to acknowledge, that it requires them to believe things that are incomprehensible ; but the truth of which it offers to prove by matters of fact, which they are at liberty to examine with the utmost strictness. Whatever objections may be made against the mysteries of religion, yet still they must be believed, say the defenders of it, if *Jesus Christ*, and his apostles, who preached them, wrought the miracles recorded in the New Testament. But *Jesus Christ*, and his apostles, did work those miracle. Therefore — What now does the unbeliever reply to this ? Does he attack the first or the second part of the argument ? Surely

Surely he cannot. The first is plain enough to common sense. The second has all the certainty that history can give it ; and, besides, the thorough discussion of this point would require more knowledge than persons of these principles are usually furnished with. What is it then, that he does ? He makes objections against the mysteries.

VIII.

I have sometimes seen libertine wits encounter divines of learning, upon the subject of religion ; and, if my compassion had not been a check upon me, I could have diverted myself very heartily. It seemed to me like a woman disputing upon the *Antipodes* with an able geographer.

IX.

It is a weakness of mind, to believe upon slender proofs ; but it is as great a weakness, not to believe upon demonstrative ones. But such are the proofs of religion ; and therefore the persons, who look upon themselves to have the strongest minds, are, in reality, but weak.

It seems to me, that there is even something more mortifying, in not perceiving evidence where it is, than in fancying one sees it where it is not ; and that the person who does not assent to reason, when it is clearly shewn to him, is much more contemptible,
than

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than he who embraces a false opinion upon reasons that are insufficient.

It was said of two men, that you might sometimes deceive the one, but you could never undeceive the other. I had much rather be the first of these two, than the second.

There is a weakness in believing every thing ; but it shews a brutal kind of obstinacy to deny every thing.

He who believes every thing, is a weak man ; but he who should doubt of every thing, would be a fool.

X.

The errors that are most ridiculous, are those that are opposed to truths generally received. Common errors, however ridiculous and void of proof they may be, have, at least, the authority of numbers on their side.

Either unbelievers have studied the arguments for religion, or they have not studied them. In the first place, they are very stupid, or very corrupt, that they have not felt the force of them : in the other, they are very fool-hardy, for having chosen their principles blindfold, in a matter where a mistake has dreadful consequences.

XI.

There are men of wit among the professors of infidelity, perhaps more than of any other

other sort : there are also some men of learning : and no doubt but there may be found some with strong principles of honour and sobriety. But that there are any amongst them, who, besides a purity of heart and manners, are possessed of a solid judgment, and extensive knowledge, is what I have great difficulty to believe.

XII.

Nothing can be more senseless, than to talk against religion. Those who practise it have an interest in its being true ; and those who do not practise it, have the same in its being false ; but it is equally for the interest of them both, that it should be believed.

Even atheism itself has its enthusiasts ; witness *Vanini*. For the true idea of enthusiasm is a furious zeal for groundless opinions. But if enthusiasts in general are the most odious and despicable of all men, what must we think of enthusiastic atheists?





O F

R I C H E S.



IN what is it that the proper use of riches consists? In the first place, it consists, according to that famous saying of one of the fathers, in barely using, and not enjoying them; that is to say, as the scripture expresses it, in not *setting our affections upon them*. Riches are not given for us to be fond of them; and whenever we are so, we pervert the design of them. On the contrary, an indifference to them comprehends every thing that is implied in the right use of them. The person that keeps his heart free from the love of riches, is secure against that ridiculous pride, which the possession of them is too apt to inspire. As he does not look upon them to be a good, he can never consider them as any thing meritorious. An indifference to riches, too, supposes an indifference to the things they procure, the honours and pleasures of life; and con-

consequently, where this temper prevails, they are not likely to be employed in these pursuits : so that the person who is exempt from this passion, must of course be from any other ; for every passion leads, more or less directly, to a passion for riches, because these are looked upon as the essential means of all gratification ; and, in fact, they are, in a manner, all-sufficient. Whatever be our aim, they smooth and shorten the way to it : they facilitate the acquisition even of glory itself. In short, the person who is fond, neither of riches, nor of the grandeur and delight that attend upon them ; who keeps at an equal distance from the sordid avarice that hoards them up, and the senseless prodigality that squanders them in expences, that are always unjustifiable, when they are needless ; I say, such a person will never employ them, but to do real service, either to himself, or his friends, or to the society in which he lives, and of which he considers himself as a part.

• II.

Disinterestedness and modesty are virtues so essential to the good order of society, that all its disquiets arise, in a manner, from the contrary vices. What is it, in fact, that sets men against one another, and counteracts the strong propensity they are born with to mutual love and good-will ? What, but pride and interest ? These are the grand sources

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of hatred and debate. Banish these from the hearts of men, and you will find them full of benevolence and friendship, and will establish among them an unalterable peace and harmony. Man would then no longer look upon man as his rival and competitor, but would consider him purely as man, that is to say, as another self.

In general, all the passions arm men against one another. I am an enemy, by birth, to the person who has pretensions to the same thing with myself. Hence it is, that love, by means of jealousy, has sometimes produced such unhappy effects ; but (besides that there is frequently more of vanity, than love, in the passion of jealousy) disorders from this cause are rare in comparison of those which proceed daily from pride and interest.

The disinterested person must observe, that the generality of men are engaged in the pursuits of fortune. He must lament it undoubtedly, and the more heartily in those who have most success. Yet he has no ill-will to them. He goes not himself in their track, and seeks not to increase his fortune ; or, if he does increase it by his industry and prudent œconomy, he has the authority of religion and morality for so doing. For all that religion condemns in the acquisition of wealth, is only the injustice of the means, and the excess of the appetite : so that the good Christian acts, on many occasions, pretty

ty much like other men. His conduct is, outwardly, the same; but, as it proceeds from other views and motives than those of covetousness, he is indifferent to the good or bad success of his cares and endeavours. He sees, without envy, that others are happier than himself, (in the common sense of the word) or are men of more dexterity and cunning. Even the injustice they may do him in his fortune will not provoke him to hate them. They cannot deprive him of what he has set his heart upon. Could they spoil him of the greatest part of what he is possessed of, they would only release him from a burden, and deliver him from a dangerous embarrassment. As he uses his fortune, not so much for himself as for other people, a change in that would make none in his way of living. He could only be sensible of the abatement, by his having nothing to bestow; and his incapacity to relieve the indigent would be to him the only evil of poverty.

III.

Pride has a greater share, than even interest itself, in banishing from the heart of men that affection they ought to have for one another: it is because these two passions unite in all our contests, and that, besides the interest in dispute, we always make it a matter of honour to carry our point, that we push our resentments so far, and take up such irreconcilable enmities. It is not

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always the detriment we receive by it, that affects us most sensibly in the loss of a lawsuit. How many persons do we see, that, to gain a verdict in their favour, where a point of interest was depending, would freely spend double the value of the thing in dispute !

The case is the same in gaming. It is covetousness, indeed, partly, that has made it so common; and yet vanity is not without its share, both in the pleasure of winning, and the uneasiness of losing; and this, even in games of pure chance.

IV.

Altho', on some occasions, pride and self-interest may be opposite, and a person may be disinterested from a principle of pride; yet, generally speaking, it may be truly said, that an indifference to riches supposes a freedom from pride; and, on the contrary, that the love of riches is a natural consequence of pride and vanity. It is not merely for the sake of enjoying the pleasures of sense, that men covet being rich. No—the most considerable advantage of riches, in the eyes of the generality of men, (who are more proud and vain, even than they are sensual) is the weight which they give to the owners, the respect which they procure them, and the independent condition in which they place them. And, as a proof, that we are more in love with riches from our pride, than

than a regard to the pleasures of sense, it is observable, that when people are obliged by any misfortunes to retrench their expences, they chuse rather to abridge themselves in the enjoyments, or even the necessaries of life, than in articles where their pride is concerned.

In how many ways is our pride gratified by wealth ! Posts of honour and authority are generally given to the rich, and are, for the most part, rather bought than merited. But, without any assistance from dignity and place, the rich man, merely as such, is the idol of all those who have a view to his favours. What assiduous complaisance, agreeable flattery, profound respect, is he sure to receive ? Nor is this homage, that is paid to him, always forced, but proceeds often from the most real veneration in those who pay it. The splendor which his wealth throws round the man of fortune, so dazzles their weak eyes, that they are blind to his faults ; makes them see virtues in him, which he has not ; and magnifies, out of all reason, those which he has,

But this is not all ; There are persons, perhaps, tho' but few, who are not capable of being flattered by a respect they do not deserve ; and therefore I will go further, and say, that riches are of great service in the way of acquiring a real respect and reputation, as they serve to produce, into a fuller light, those virtues which give a title to it. Merit makes a very different figure in the

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rich man and the poor one ; and it is much truer of wealth, even than it is of beauty, that it gives a lustre to virtue, and adds new charms to it in the most philosophical eyes. But all this homage, distinction, and regard, which wealth procures to us, must necessarily gratify us in proportion to our pride ; and consequently, our love of riches must be in the same proportion.

V.

You tell a man of fortune, who values himself upon it, that he is not at all more respected for having ten thousand a year. But this is not true. Tell him only, that he deserves no more respect for it. His right to it you may call in question ; but, that he has it, is indisputable.

If I was rich, said a man of wit, of narrow fortune, I should make a better figure than I do : it would give me more spirit and assurance ; and whatever figure I made, would be sure to be more taken notice of.

It is the observation of a poet, That the most grievous part of poverty is its making a person mean and contemptible, and even ridiculous, in the eye of the world *. Hence so many poor persons less afflicted with their poverty, than ashamed to have it known. A person was persuading one of this mind,

* Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se,
Quam quod ridiculos homines facit.

to make his condition known to some people, that were capable of helping him. Stay a little, reply'd he : my misery, when it is come to its full extremity, may quite extinguish, or, at least, overcome in myself that shame, which keeps me from making it known ; as the pity of other people may also be too strong for that contempt, which an open poverty never fails to excite in them. At present, I have neither courage to ask, nor hope of succeeding. Contempt is close and hard-hearted : pity only is charitable.

How terrible must it be to any, but a person of the most exalted virtue, to have occasion to think, that his humiliations are in vain, and fail to procure him that pity which is all he has to depend upon !

How noble an answer was it, that a rich man once made to a person he had given a considerable alms to, and who was expressing his gratitude for it ! It is God, only whom you ought to thank, because it is he who hath given me my fortune, and the disposition to part with some of it to you. For my part, I render him my humble thanks, for having made me acquainted with your merit, and your necessities.

VI.

A person may employ riches well, I mean, for the good of society, from motives of pride. And what would become of the miserable, if it was charity only that relieved

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lieved them ? What of society in general, if our passions had not sometimes the effect of virtues ? There is a proud kind of liberality, which supplies the want of a good heart, and christian charity. I do not mean proud, as it inspires pride, but as it has pride for its principle. But, in that case, a person is not in a true state of indifference to riches. He is fond of them, at least, for the glory of bestowing them. I say, for the glory ; for if he loves them merely for the pleasure of doing good to others, without any view to their gratitude or esteem ; this motive is very laudable. Nor let it be said, that it is carrying the matter too high, to allow men in their beneficent actions to be sensible of no other pleasure but that of being useful ; for so far it must be carried, if we would talk with exactness, and according to truth. For a person may be guilty of giving from a principle of pride, without having a view to that outward honour which consists in the praise of men. It is enough, if he aims at that inward applause and esteem, that testimony which a person receives from himself upon a good action. To aim only at one's own esteem, argues just so much the more pride, as it implies a high opinion of one's self, and a contempt of other people. Such was the pride of the heathen philosophers, a pride as opposite to true virtue, as the grossest kind of it,

VII.

Where there is an indifference to riches, founded upon a freedom from, or a command over, those passions which are gratified by means of them, and where the most considerable obstacles to the love of other men are removed by a sincere disinterestedness and humility, it will require no new effort of virtue in a man of fortune to be charitable. It doubles the ease of bestowing, where we have a great value for the persons we give to, and a very small one for the things we give. There is no necessity, therefore, of exhorting such a person to give generously, tho' there may be some of teaching him to give with discretion and prudence. His heart is already well disposed, and he wants only to inform his judgment. And there is so much the more occasion for his being acquainted with those rules which reason and religion prescribe for the conduct of our charity, as a person commonly gives the most inconsiderately, when he sets the least value upon the things given.

VIII.

Generosity, conducted by prudence, is the most certain method of acquiring the love and esteem of all the world. But this esteem, I own, is partly founded upon our self-love, which inclines us to pay a sort of honour to every thing we think is for our own advantage; and it must be allowed too, that we
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are frequently imposed upon by this self-love, and led to give the name of virtue to such qualities as are merely useful, and not laudable at bottom. But, as to the judicious liberality I have been speaking of, the philosopher joins with the rest of the world in commending it : and, indeed, he understands, better than they do, the full value of this virtue ; because he judges of it more by the nobleness of its principles, and the purity of its views, than by the good effects which it produces. The philosopher, I mean the Christian philosopher, sees frequently the whole system of virtues, where the common people see but some single one.

IX.

But, amongst the good effects of prudent liberality in persons of fortune, the common people see only the most sensible and considerable. They can see when a person is restored from an almost desperate fortune, by the generosity of a friend disguising a present under the appearance of a loan. They can see the sick cured or comforted, the poor clothed and fed by ample and extensive charities ; and stately edifices, fit for the reception of kings, inhabited by the lowest of their subjects. But they cannot see a thousand virtues, that are occasioned, and as many crimes prevented, by the good use of riches. The man, perhaps, who, in the desperation of his fortunes, might have had recourse

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course to injustice to retrieve them, now he is reinstated by the bounty, is moved by the example of his benefactor ; is taught to employ what he can spare, in the same way, and expresses his thankfulness by an imitation of him. The soldier, whom age or his wounds have incapacitated for serving his prince or country, not only finds the reward of his labours in that retreat which a pious and royal magnificence has provided for him, but is also furnished with the means of retrieving a licentious life, and making provision for his future happiness. The virgin, who, under the security of the convent, is brought up to a life of distinguished sanctity, might, perhaps, have found invincible temptations in her beauty, and her poverty, if some person, less moved with her charms, than the dangers to which they exposed her, had not opened to her that retreat for her virtue, from which her poverty had excluded her. The preacher, whose lively and convincing eloquence makes him of so much use in the world, and the scholar, whose performances do so much honour to his age and country, might now, perhaps, have been chained down to the lowest and most servile employment, if some person of fortune, as sagacious in discerning merit, as zealous to cherish it, had not, thro' all the disadvantages of an untutor'd infancy, discovered the seeds of uncommon genius, and taken care to have them cultivated by a proper educa-

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education. Such are the great advantages of a Christian liberality. It is a concern for the soul, that is the only principle upon which to promote a care for the body. It is eternity, and another life, we must have in view, in doing good to beings that were created for eternity. The religious man of fortune extends his views further than the desires of those he relieves, and may be said to give them more than they ask.

X.

Riches must be made an exception from what is commonly said of all other things, that they cloy upon enjoyment. In other things, our inclination for one object frequently gives place to another, as the love of honour to that of pleasure. But our taste for riches always subsists, and gets every day stronger and stronger, because it is by this alone, that we are capable of gratifying every other. The more a person sees, the more he is convinced of, the usefulness and even necessity of riches, the more he finds, that without them he can do nothing, and with them every thing. Hence it is a saying common enough in the mouths of some pretended philosophers, That there is no real good in the world but riches. They excite and strengthen all our passions, by furnishing them with the means of their gratification. And the passions, once excited, in their turn, augment the love of riches. And thus it is,
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that riches attach us still more strongly to riches ; and the more they increase, the more we covet them, by increasing the number and strength of our passions, and consequently of our wants.

XI.

Riches are never loved, merely as such, Those who amass them the most eagerly, without using them, and who look upon heaps of wealth as so charming a spectacle, and are therefore charged with loving them for themselves, do, in reality, love them only with a view to the necessities and conveniences of life. The fear of not having it in their power, at some time or other, to supply these, is at bottom the occasion of their excessive parsimony.

The mistake of the covetous, says the lady, whose reflections we have amongst those of M. Rochefoucault, lies in their taking gold and silver for real goods, whereas they are only the means of procuring them. The thought is ingenious, but I question whether it be quite so true. It is certain, that gold and silver are, in their nature, no other than means ; but then certainly misers know this. Their mistake, and their folly, lie not in loving money for itself ; but in their being afraid, amidst whole heaps of it, that they shall want the necessities of life, and in depriving themselves of them for that very reason. Thus, when it is said, that
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the covetous make an end of that which is only a means, it is only meant, that they place their happiness, not in enjoying the pleasures and conveniences of life, but in having it in their power to enjoy them, and in securing the possibility of this enjoyment to the most distant futurity they have a prospect of. It is to no purpose, therefore, to endeavour to reform a miser, by undeceiving him about the nature of riches ; but we must, if possible, fortify him against the fears of futurity, and the uncertainty of human events *. But it is commonly said, That there is no remedy against fear ; and it is upon this account, that there is none against avarice, which is not so much an error of the understanding, as a weakness of the heart. The generality of covetous people have a share of sense, but they are almost all cowards and poltrons. They reflect ; they reason a good deal ; and it is this that misleads them. Being governed in their reflections by that fear they are under the power of, they see all the misfortunes that are possible, in human affairs, ready to fall upon their heads. The strongest probabilities of a lasting prosperity are not sufficient to make them hope it ; but they look upon it as a point of wisdom to fear, and of consequence to guard against every thing that can happen.

* Cogitatus præscientiæ avertit sensum. *Eccles.* xxxi. 2.

XIII.

Riches are frequently the cause, and the effects, of infinite injustice ; injustice, so much the more crying, as the poor is commonly the object and the victim of it. The rich man shall often not only see with envy the wealth of his equals and superiors, but a competency, next to indigence itself, shall excite his criminal desires. He could wish, indeed, that there was not a rich man in the world besides himself, and that the wealth of all the rest was in his hands ; but those very riches he burns to invade, give the masters a protection from his attempts. But a victory over the poor man is more easy ; and if the spoils be not so considerable, he makes himself amends by the number of his victims. In the methods he takes to enlarge his treasures, all he considers is, whether they are easy and sure of success ; or, at best, whether he may not be liable to be detected and punished for the injustice of them ; for he never prefers just methods to unjust, except when they are equally effectual.

It is therefore not only difficult to make a good use of riches, but it is difficult to be free from guilt in the possession of them. It is not only difficult to assist and relieve the distressed, but difficult not to bring many into distresses. Strange inversion of things ! The rich, in the designs of Providence, is

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rich only for the poor ; and yet, in fact, the poor is poor only by means of the rich,

XIII.

The precise idea of virtue is justice, acquired and preserved by laborious efforts and endeavours. If justice was natural to man, and cost him nothing, it would be his happiness, rather than his merit ; a perfection in him, rather than a virtue.

But there are different degrees in justice, and there is also more or less difficulty in acquiring and preserving it, according to a person's rank, constitution, and character. But the virtue of the just man depends upon these two things ; the degree of his justice, and the greatness and number of the obstacles which he must have conquered to attain it, and which he must still be superior to, in order to maintain it. Thus the most virtuous of all men is he who is most just, and who has most difficulty in being so ; he who is arrived at a high degree of justice, and who perseveres in it by dint of strong efforts and conflicts.

But, on one hand, the good use of riches supposes the most perfect justice, and all the most eminent and necessary virtues ; and, on the other hand, riches are the most considerable obstacles to justice, and these virtues. And, of consequence, the rich man, that makes the best use of his riches, is the most

virtuous of all rich men, and therefore of all men.

Thus the Scripture, describing the character of the virtuous rich man, cries out, Who is this happy man? Or, Where shall we find him? Of what praises is he not worthy? He has done things that are admirable. He has been proved by wealth, and found perfect. But what then is this so singular virtue, and in what does it consist? He might have broken the commandment of God, adds the sacred text, and he has not broken it. He might have done ill, and he has not done it. A freedom from crimes, in a condition that affords all the encouragement, and all the temptations, to them that can be; and an inclination constantly determined to what is right, with a constant power of doing what is wrong; it is this that exalts the virtue of the man of fortune so much above that of other men. Want of power to do ill, frequently takes away all thoughts of it, stifles unjust desires in their very birth, destroys dangerous inclinations; or, at least, locks them up in the soul, and, as it were, lays them to sleep. But an easiness of gratifying them awakes them again, sets them at liberty, and, in a manner, creates them anew; and we see every vice springing up in a heart, where nature had laid the seeds of every virtue.

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It is more difficult of the two, for a rich man to acquire or preserve wisdom, than for a wise man to acquire riches.

Besides, riches come sometimes to the poor man, without, properly speaking, his acquiring them. Wisdom is always an acquisition to the person who wants it, and the fruit of pains and labour.

XIV.

But may not a person lay out part of his fortune upon the innocent pleasures and enjoyments of life ; and, while he pursues the general design of promoting happiness with it, may not his own happiness come in for a share ? If to an inoffensive justice he joins a beneficent and useful charity, will not his conduct be quite irreproachable ? Before men it may, but not in the sight of God. It may be, without exception, upon the principles of human morality, which judges merely with regard to civil society, and considers only the duties that are due from men to one another ; but it is not so, upon the principles of that system, which defines justice to be a conformity to the eternal order of things, which teaches us, that man being made for God, and God being the only good of man, order requires, that man should love nothing but God ; and therefore, that all worldly pleasure is dangerous, because it attaches us too much to the object of it, or, rather, to the pleasure itself ; and,
still

still more, that all pleasure, that is unnecessary, and sought merely as such, cannot be called innocent, because it is not allowed to love pleasure for the sake of pleasure, and propose it for an end in any action ; that a person therefore must not only confine himself in his use of the creatures within the bounds of necessity, but he must contract those bounds as much as possible, retrench, in some measure, even in necessities themselves. All this is comprised in the good use of riches.

XV.

Preachers are perpetually inculcating those woes denounced by *Jesus* Christ against riches and rich men. How then shall we reconcile these frightful ideas, and terrible characters of a state of wealth, with the great promises made to almsgiving, and the relief of the poor, in Scripture ? For, if salvation is annexed to almsgiving, to whom can it be more easy than to the rich, who are so plentifully provided with the means of doing it ? It is true, that nothing is easier to the rich, than to give alms, if they are disposed to it ; but nothing is so hard for them as to be disposed to it, especially upon truly christian motives ; because nothing is more difficult in the possession of riches, than to preserve those two dispositions, which are the principles of christian charity ; I mean, an indifference to riches, and a sensibility to the wants of the poor ; that is to say, the love

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of God, who enjoins them to give alms, and the love of their neighbour, who expects it of them. If, sometimes, some remains of natural compassion are awakened in their breasts; if their hearts are opened at the sight or hearing of some moving distress; an avarice stronger than their pity keeps their hands shut. Thus, while riches afford their owners a certain means of salvation, from that very means arises an obstacle in great danger of being too strong for the disposition to make use of them.

It must be allowed, this extreme difficulty, that attends the right use of riches, and in which lies the merit of the rich, that are virtuous, affords some extenuation for the weaknesses and faults of those of another sort; and, consequently, ought to correct that bitterness of zeal with which persons frequently inveigh against them. Persons would have more candour, if they had more judgment; and if they were well acquainted with human nature, would be more ready to make allowance for its faults. They might lament, but not hate it. But this very difficulty renders those inexcusable, who, in a middle condition of life, envy that of the rich, and use their utmost endeavours to attain to it: yet this desire of riches is a disposition as common, as a freedom from it is perfection of christianity. Where then is our faith? For, of all the truths which are the objects of it, is there any one
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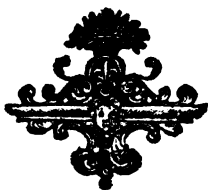
more clearly and more frequently delivered, than the difficulty of Salvation in a state of riches ? Or is there a truth, in which both Reason and Religion are better agreed ?

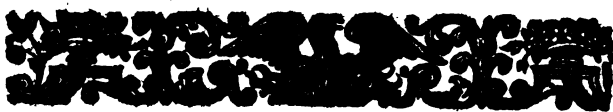
XVI.

Persons lay themselves out, with great seeming zeal, against a man who has made his fortune by criminal methods ; but, at bottom of their hearts, they envy him. They load him with all the hard names they can think of. They say to others, that he is a villain ; and to themselves, that he is happy.

Successful crimes pass for virtues, in the great, in kings, conquerors, &c. In our equals or inferiors, a crime appears just so much the more odious and detestable, the more advantage it has been of to the person that committed it.

It is a great misfortune to a person's self, and other people, to be very rich, or very poor, with bad inclinations.





T H E
CONCLUSION.

 ORKS of the nature of those the reader has been perusing, that is to say, Books of Reflections, are not the most likely to meet with success. In the first place, this kind of writing is not very agreeable in itself. It is too lifeless, too serious, and requires too much attention. As to persons who are pleased with reflections, because they are accustomed to think and reflect themselves, they have probably made a good progress in this way already, and consequently are very hard to satisfy. In order to please them, you must give them something new. But what is there, that can appear new, to persons who have already had, by reading and reflection, every thing that is of value in this kind? What can one add to that immense treasure of reflections, which they have amassed from the thoughts of so many great geniuses, and from their own?

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It is true, indeed, that by their being acquainted with the best things that have been said already, they will be sure to distinguish that which has not been said ; whereas other readers are not capable of discerning what is new from what is not. But it does not follow from hence, that it is always easier to gain the good opinion of these more ignorant readers, than of those who have both sense and reading. The first sort frequently take thoughts that are quite new for very common ones, because they are so true and natural, that they think any man in the world must have had the same. They should have had them themselves, they cry ; and, in saying so, they are not so properly guilty of a falshood, as a mistake. For it is natural enough for us, when we hear the thoughts of another person, to imagine, that we might have had the same, though, in fact, they would never have entered into our heads. But, now, things of this kind are never admired. It is true, we always *approve* an author, when he thinks as we do ; but we never *admire* him, but when he makes us think like him, either by instructing our ignorance, or correcting our mistakes. Thus it has been said, with good reason, that, in order to succeed in reflections of the moral and metaphysical kind, a person must think better, not only than others think, but even than they take themselves to think.

On

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On the other hand, if these reflections, equally new and true, which you have in your work, are of a deeper and more refined kind, and more remote from common notions, they appear false to the generality of readers ; or, at least, too subtile.

Besides, nothing is more common, and my book, perhaps, will be a new proof of it, than for a writer to fall into the False and the Whimsical, while he is in quest of the New ; and to be kept from rising above what is common, from a fear of exceeding the truth.

F I N I S.



